

CHRIS MOONEY ON JOHN ZOGBY'S INCREDIBLY CREATIVE POLLING

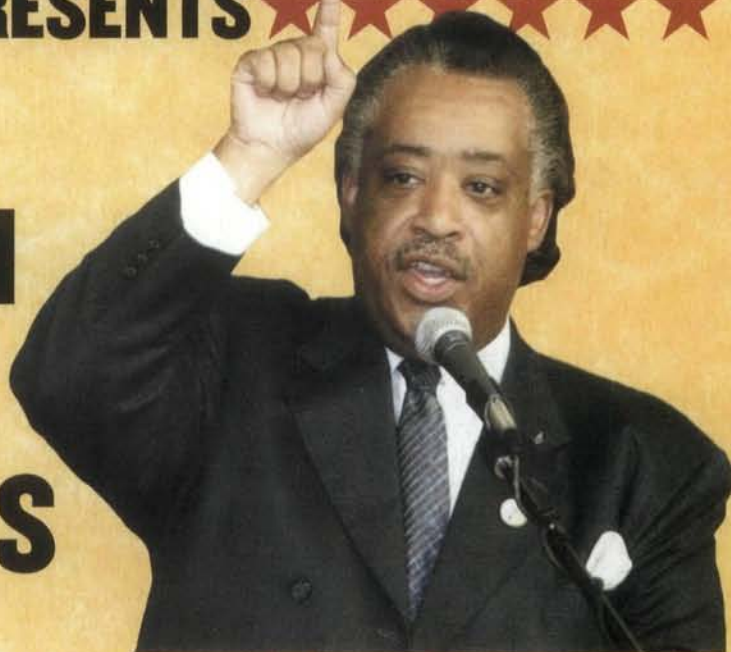
THE AMERICAN PROSPECT

FEBRUARY 2003

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★★★★★ PRESENTS ★★★★★

AL "THE REV."
SHARPTON
VS.
THE
DEMOCRATS



SPOILING FOR A FIGHT

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News

Hawks and Korea

IVO H. DAALDER AND JAMES M. LINDSAY

tor

Iran: Our New Best Friend?

I. F. JONES

NOY THRUPKAEW

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Will You Help Ashley and Her Dad?

Federal prosecutors won't permit court testimony concerning why marijuana was used, even though marijuana is permitted as medicine under the laws of California and eight other states.

And because juries have no way of knowing otherwise, Federal prosecutors accuse patients and good Samaritans of being "Drug King Pins."



*Bryan Epis's daughter Ashley.**

How can judges and jurors dispense "justice and mercy" without relevant information?

According to a TIME / CNN poll, 80% of Americans approve of medical marijuana.

Please urge Attorney General Ashcroft to permit the presentation of all of the evidence. And ask your congressman and senators to pass a law preventing future concealment.

Will You Act?

* Bryan Epis was sentenced to ten years. The story the jury did not hear: In 1983, while in high school, Bryan was a passenger in a car that hit a telephone pole. The car decelerated from 35 mph to 0 in 20 milliseconds. Bryan had lacerations all over his body, 15 inches of lacerations in his skull, his sternum was fractured and two ribs were broken. The T2 and T3 vertebrae suffered compression fractures. The surgery just to stitch his head together lasted 2½ hours. He was in a coma for two days, and intensive care for three days. The surgeon said he was lucky not to be a vegetable or dead. Bryan began two years of physical therapy. He was told that the compression fractures would never heal, and they haven't. He suffers from chronic pain. He was prescribed heavy narcotic and narcotic derivative drugs, codeine and Vicodin for the pain. In 1983, his orthopedic surgeon recommended marijuana as a drug that could relieve pain better than the narcotics. Bryan used cannabis from 1983 to 1997. Using marijuana in combination with exercise, he reduced the pain level from level 10 to level 1. While using cannabis in his treatment, he finished high school; finished the grueling program for a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering from California State University at Chico in May 1991 (only 1 in 5 who enter the program graduate); and finished law school at California Northern School of Law in May 1998. Bryan's explanation for growing the marijuana was that he needed it to alleviate his pain and to help other seriously ill patients.

Kevin B. Zeese, President, Common Sense for Drug Policy

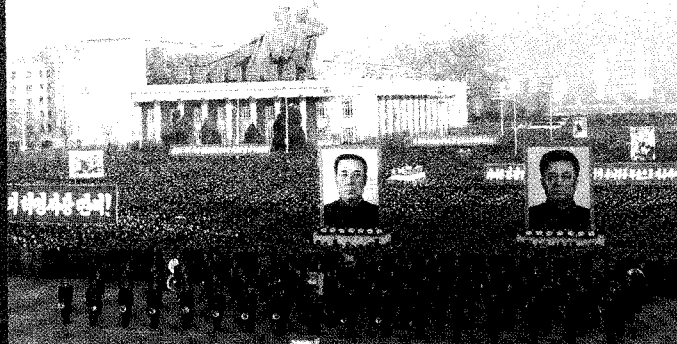
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COVER: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO; SIDE PREIS/GETTY IMAGES; ABOVE: AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

Never Mind

BY ROBERT KUTTNER

ONE OF THE MOST ASTONISHING recent events is the spectacle of Bill Richardson, formerly Bill Clinton's ambassador to the United Nations, literally mediating between the Bush administration and the North Koreans. Even weirder is how this anomalous piece of freelancing came about. The North Koreans had enjoyed a constructive relationship with Richardson, who was recently elected governor of New Mexico. They put out informal feelers, and Richardson got a green light from Colin Powell to proceed with back-channel talks.

Imagine the reaction of Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and the administration's other ultras. You can also imagine the right's hoots of derision if a Democratic president had to rely on a Republican governor spontaneously acting to save the president from the folly of his own policy. Richardson, please recall, was a leading player in an administration whose Korea policy Bush has sought to disavow and reverse. By carelessly including North Korea in a spurious "axis of evil" and then demonstrating what happens to other members of that axis, Bush practically invited North Korea to conclude that its only recourse was a policy of nuclear brinkmanship. [See Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, "Where Are the Hawks on North Korea?" page 28.] Bush's Korea policy has thus violated both the first commandment of foreign policy (let sleeping dogs lie) and the second (you have to pick your fights).

Now Bush is backpedaling furiously. Events in North Korea both mock his Iraq policy and demonstrate, counter to administration doctrine, that you can't really engage more than one crisis at a time. At least on the surface, Iraq is grudgingly cooperating with inspectors, who have found nothing. North Korea is defying the international community and boasting about its nuclear program. The administration, meanwhile, is twisting itself into a pretzel trying to explain why its Iraq policy should not be its Korea policy, and vice

versa. Events also demonstrate the larger folly of the grandiose belief that America has the capacity or moral authority to make over the world in its own image.

A FRIEND WHO IS A U.S. BUSINESSMAN based in the Far East recently called our attention to a right-wing outfit called New American Century. On the organization's Web site (www.newamericancentury.org) is a manifesto dated June 3, 1997, that is absolutely chilling in its overreach. "We need to accept responsibility for America's unique role in preserving and extending an international order friendly to our security, our prosperity, and our principles," the manifesto concludes. Among the signers are Cheney and Rumsfeld. Suppose, said our friend, you substituted the word "Japan's" or "Russia's" for the word "America's." How would we feel if some other country were hell-bent on making the world over in its image, for its narrow national purposes? Our friend, who is not notably left wing, reports an upsurge of anti-American feelings from longtime allies, at a time when America's vulnerability to terrorist attacks should be engendering sympathy. He fears that the Bush foreign policy will both lead to greater risks and also make it harder for American business to pursue constructive partnerships.

The isolation of the Bush administra-

tion from friendly world opinion is underappreciated and underreported. At this writing, Bush is reportedly determined to make war sometime in late February, while Hans Blix and Kofi Annan are equally determined to continue the inspection process well into March. Meanwhile, with European voters increasingly opposed to the war, even Tony Blair's government in the United Kingdom is sending mixed signals about its prior close support of Bush's Iraq policy. The Germans and French are hardening their opposition, and the Turks, on Iraq's northern border, may well deny the United States use of their bases.

What next? Bush has already amassed some 150,000 troops in the Persian Gulf. Will he dare to make war without United Nations and allied support? Having set up the entire exercise as a test of American resolve, can he find some fig leaf to bring the troops home and declare that he has tamed Iraq and avoided war—without sounding less like Teddy Roosevelt than Gilda Radner? ("Never mind.") Or, with the economy in free fall, can he keep the troops in a state of high alert and preserve the February war option for when he may really need it: in February 2004?

Last May, stunned by the sheer stupidity of Bush's axis-of-evil formulation, we ran a cover story by Harold Meyerson titled "Axis of Incompetence." If anything, that was an understatement. What we have now is a mix of arrogance and blunder, with stakes as high as anything during the worst crisis of the Cold War. ♦

EDITOR'S NOTE: With this issue the *Prospect* becomes a monthly. Look for our new design in March.

The Rove Machine Rolls On

BY ROBERT B. REICH

IT'S NO ACCIDENT THAT KARL ROVE was one of Richard Nixon's moles. Using techniques developed by his first mentor, dirty-tricks strategist Donald Segretti, Rove infiltrated Democratic organizations on behalf of Nixon's infamous 1972 campaign. Rove's formidable talents came to the attention

of George Bush Senior, then incoming Republican National Committee chairman, and the rest is history. Seven presidential campaigns later, Rove masterminded a deluge of disinformation against John McCain, whose upset victory in New Hampshire had given him a shot at the Republican nomination. Word

was spread among South Carolina voters that McCain had fathered a black daughter out of wedlock (McCain had, in fact, adopted a Bangladeshi girl), that McCain was a homosexual, that McCain's wife had a drug problem and so on.

Now Rove is masterminding the Bush administration's press strategy, but it's far more than a press strategy. It's the central strategy for how the public understands what George W. Bush is doing to and for America. In an important sense, it is the Bush presidency. Rove's methodology largely explains why Bush's popularity remains strong despite the unremittingly awful economy (mounting job losses, weak profits and a three-year stock-market slide) and despite the shambles of the administration's foreign policy (Osama bin Laden still at large, al-Qaeda as dangerous as ever, North Korea more menacing than ever, Israelis and Palestinians as far away from the bargaining table as ever, anti-Americanism rising across the globe and a pending war in Iraq lacking clear justification).

A midterm *USA Today*/CNN/Gallup Poll had Bush's job approval rating falling to 58 percent, dropping below 60 percent for the first time since the September 11 attacks. Under these circumstances, any other president would be in danger of losing his job. But Rove has convinced the press, and therefore the American public, that this presidency is nearly invincible. He has done it with an ingenious blend of chicanery and obfuscation, aided by the Democrats' utter incapability of devising a coherent message in response.

Use whatever excuse is available at the time to justify the administration's long-term ideological agenda. Rove is adept at framing Bush's goals as responses to immediate problems, and orchestrating Republican and right-wing policy experts to give the policies enough patina of credibility to satisfy the media. A lousy economy? We need to eliminate taxes on dividends. Never mind that this supposed remedy has nothing to do with stimulating the economy; it's a "jobs and growth plan for the long term," whatever that means. The continuing threat of terrorism? We need to invade Iraq. Forget that Saddam Hussein has for years been at odds with al-Qaeda or that North Korea is a

more potent and dangerous supplier of nuclear components; we must eliminate Hussein's capacity to produce weapons of mass destruction before he uses them.

Count on the American public's (and the media's) inability to remember anything from one year to the next. The Rove machine gave Bush tough talking points on corporate fraud when the newspapers were full of Enron, Global Crossing, WorldCom and Tyco, and when reporters were asking uncomfortable questions about Bush's and Cheney's own corporate dealings. Rove played for time, assuming that war-mongering about Iraq (carefully orchestrated to begin just a few months before the midterm elections) would bury the issue. He was right. The administration dragged its feet on reform, and a year out almost nothing has changed. Another example: Rove sold the administration's \$1.35 trillion tax cut in 2001 as a way to spur the ailing economy. Obviously it had no such effect, but Rove assumed no one would remember. Right again. Now the White House is selling the administration's 2003 tax cut as a way to spur the ailing economy.

Keep everything under wraps. The only other administration in living memory as secretive as this one was—no surprise—Richard Nixon's. Whether it's Dick Cheney's Energy Task Force, John Ashcroft's gag orders, the White House's anti-

abortion strategy, its plan for gutting environmental protections and regulations, or its assault on civil liberties under the guise of homeland security, the public knows almost nothing about what's actually occurring. Leaks are rare. Information is parceled out carefully. Reporters who tell the story the way Rove would like it told (Bob Woodward) get special access. All others are kept in the dark.

Cut embarrassing players loose and pretend they're exceptions. Trent Lott was dead meat in the White House as soon as the press figured out that he meant what he said. Rove carefully let it be known that the administration supported Bill Frist for Senate majority leader. Rove also kept the attention focused on Lott and off the administration (Ashcroft's racist history as Missouri's attorney general, the administration's pending position on the Supreme Court case about affirmative action at the University of Michigan, Judge Charles Pickering's noisome record on civil rights and so on). Likewise, after Harvey Pitt dug himself into a hole at the Securities and Exchange Commission, Rove abruptly cut off his lifeline and pretended the White House had wanted vigorous regulation all along.

Karl Rove is calling the shots. Richard Nixon would be proud. The rest of us should be appalled. ♦



DAN WASSERMAN IS THE EDITORIAL CARTOONIST FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE.

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CORRESPONDENCE

The Real Steel Deal

BARRY LYNN'S ARTICLE

["The Real Steel Deal," Dec. 30, 2002] leaves the reader with the impression that the impact of the safeguard tariffs put in place by the Bush administration is much broader than is the case. Originally the tariff applied only to 29 of all U.S. imports. Even with the 727 exemptions granted by the administration, the tariffs now only apply to one-fifth of U.S. imports, or 5 percent of the steel used in the United States.

Many of the 727 exemptions were for products used by the automobile industry. In his article, Mr. Lynn refers to automotive springs. The fact is that most of the steel products used in the manufacture of springs, such as wire, are not affected by the tariff.

Moreover, prices for steel affected by the tariff and used in stamping and metal fabrication—those derived from hot-rolled steel, for example, such as cold-rolled steel and galvanized steel—are higher in China than in the United States. If sourcing is shifting to China, it is because of other advantages—the undervalued yuan and low wages, for example. U.S. fabricators are not at a disadvantage vis-à-vis Chinese manufacturing owing to steel prices.

PETER MORICI
*Robert H. Smith School
of Business
University of Maryland
Via e-mail*

Barry Lynn replies:

A close reading of Peter Morici's own study on the steel tariffs, from last June, helps to explain his failure to understand how small companies are affected by such tariffs. Primary is his repeated contention that a recovery of

the price of steel on the U.S. market to its historical average should not affect the health of companies that consume steel. This ignores both how sudden price spikes on the spot market can cause grave cash flow crises in small companies and how the new nature of original equipment manufacturer-supplier relationships, especially in the automotive industry, essentially prohibits suppliers from passing higher costs on to their customers.

Morici rightly points out that big manufacturers shift sourcing to China for many reasons that have nothing to do with the price of steel. What this ignores is how, these days, any sudden surge in the cost of any major input in any American-made product is exactly what will lead a big manufacturer to take a closer look at China's other advantages.

The Cult of Karl

EVER SINCE KARL ROVE first confessed his adoration of William McKinley, commentators have been echoing the historical parallel between the administrations of McKinley and George W. Bush. Most recently is Harold Meyerson, who mentions Rove as a "latter-day Mark Hanna (the brain and muscle behind William McKinley who forged the coalition that made the Republicans the dominant party in the late-19th and early-20th centuries)" ["The Cult of Karl," Dec. 20].

Hanna and McKinley inherited a conservative Republican ascendancy that was already more than three decades old and demonstrably tiring. After Leon Czolgosz assassinated the president at the fair in Buffalo, N.Y., the nation followed Theodore

Roosevelt into the Progressive Era, and it would not elect another big-business lapdog as president for 20 years.

It may be gratifying to all of us to know just how superficial Karl Rove's reading of history really is. And while Meyerson's point about the current revival of imperialism is certainly well taken, it's a little dismaying to see no one calling out the "Mayberry Machiavelli" on a historical interpretation that would have gotten him a solid D in my old high-school class.

MIKE PAULS
Via e-mail

War and Leaks

THE GRATUITOUS, SELF-congratulatory writing of Bob Woodward was a huge disappointment by any measure of professionalism. As a

trained journalist living outside of the trade on a small island, I've come to think being "out of touch" is a negative for perspective on the real world. Eric Alterman's comments are right on target ["War and Leaks," Dec. 30]. Having read Woodward's book, the only rationale I could devise for why he would agree to put out 376 pages of spin under his good name was that by doing so now, he would someday get access and be able to report authentically when it really matters to the historical record. Kudos to Alterman.

THOMAS PETER VON BAHR
Via e-mail

The Other War

PLEASE CONVEY MY THANKS to Gary Hart for his article, "The Other War" [Dec. 16],

and for speaking up. My attempts to argue with the senators and congressional representatives of Washington state that the Congress must insist on its constitutional prerogative to declare war have been met with ambivalence and indifference, except that Sen. Patty Murray did send a sympathetic response several weeks after I wrote her. This is not the president's issue, and by neglecting its authority and duty, Congress is risking far more than civilian casualties in terrorist attacks. In fact, it is risking the entire experiment in democracy that we call the United States of America.

The authors of our Constitution were familiar with the caprice and arrogance of European monarchs, who wielded war as if it were a per-

sonal prerogative or matter of self-aggrandizement. Vesting war powers to Congress was to make war one of the most difficult and deliberate ventures that the nation could undertake. The fact that the president is not given war powers in the Constitution reflected the founders' wisdom that too many narrow influences could move a single man to engage in war. Sorrow over September 11 is one thing. Neglecting to fully debate, fully inform and fully consider the cost of this most terrible power and trust (the capacity to make war) is damnable.

There are far too few voices of courage and big-picture perspective being heard. Thanks to Mr. Hart for speaking up.

THE REV. RANDAL GARDNER
Via e-mail

Terror, Religion, and Islam

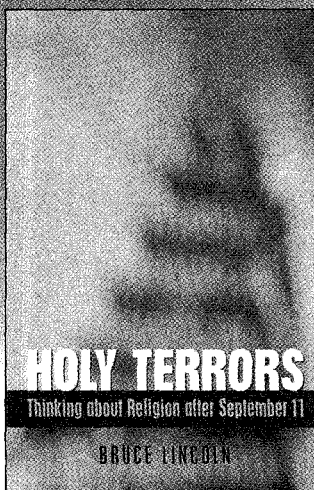
Holy Terrors

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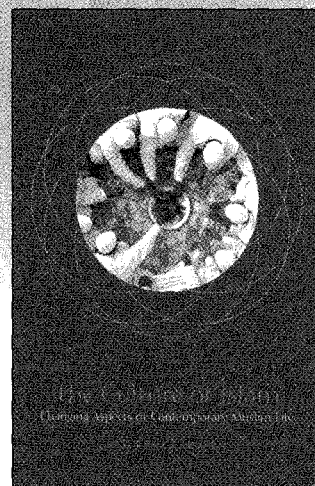
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Lawrence Rosen

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WILLIAM H. FRIST, M.D.

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THE DOCTOR IS IN. SENATE Majority Leader Bill Frist has now hung his shingle on the door to his Capitol office, and it reads, "William H. Frist, M.D." Great PR, though not something that other GOP congressional leaders can readily adapt to their own uses. "Tom DeLay, P.E." (Pest Exterminator) lacks a certain gravitas.

Frist has specifically asked the media to refer to him as "Dr."—for reasons that have little to do with the furtherance of his medical practice or of medicine itself and everything to do with his real job, which is to drug the American people into a stupor so deep that they won't convulse when the president seeks to steer seniors out of Medicare and into HMOs. [See Mary Lynn F. Jones, "New Year, New Fear," page 8 and Marcia Angell, "Dr. Frist to the Rescue," page 37.] "Bill Frist, Republican leader" and "Bill Frist, scion of the family that owns HCA, the largest for-profit hospital

chain in the nation, which just paid \$1.7 billion in fines for fraudulent Medicare billing practices," don't quite strike the same notes of disinterested science and selfless service as "good Dr. Bill."

These days, most newspapers don't use courtesy titles such as "Ms." or "Dr." after the first reference to a person. The great exception, of course, is our paper of record—and even there a turnabout is evident. If you check *The New York Times* through late last year, the Gray Lady called the Tennessee senator "Mr." on 74 occasions and "Dr." on just 61. Since Frist's year-end elevation to Senate leadership, however, he's been a "Dr." 15 times and a "Mr." only twice.

In a story that ran in the *Times* on Jan. 11, veteran political writer Robin Toner reported on the Republicans' campaign to use Frist's "trustworthy doctor's persona" to sell the HMO-ization of Medicare. She quoted

Seattle Congressman Jim McDermott—himself an M.D. and a liberal Democratic proponent of single-payer health coverage—on the Republicans' ploy: "The majority leader's M.D. is the Bush administration's 'finesse card on health care,' said Mr. McDermott, himself a psychiatrist."

"Mr. McDermott?" By what criteria do the gods on the *Times*' copy desk deem some solon-physicians "doctors" and others "misters"? By last count, there were six doctors in the House and just one—Frist—in the Senate. We can be sure that McDermott's mere misterhood isn't a function of his being a shrink, not at the *Times* we know and love. According to Allan M. Siegal, *Times* assistant managing editor, the paper's policy is to give prominent non-practicing doctors and dentists the option to use "Dr." or "Mr." When Frist became majority leader, Siegal says, "I said he should be asked. He chose Dr."

In McDermott's case, apparently, he stopped using the "M.D." shortly before his first election to Congress in

1988 because he was no longer seeing patients. Frist has never entirely abandoned his medical practice but he only began insisting that the media call him "doctor" with his elevation to majority leader. Either he thinks that with his new post, his practice will pick up (which would be true only if he, like McDermott, really were a psychiatrist) or that the Republican plan to detonate Medicare in favor of for-profit scams such as his family's HCA requires all the bedside manner he can provide to ensure its passage. The *Times*' doctorfication of Frist is consistent with copydesk rules, but those rules are being manipulated by a GOP charade. The matter demands some political, not just grammatical, judgment. Can we see an X-ray of the Gray Lady's spine?

Screening on
the Cheap

IT'S RISKY UP THERE, ON the front lines of the war against terrorism. You work long hours under constant pressure not to make a sin-

gle mistake, not to let a single weapon or potential weapon escape your notice, not to permit a single shady character to slip by while at the same time not discriminating against any class of travelers. In return, at least, you get the thanks of a grateful nation—if not plaudits and parades, at least decent pay and respect on the job.

Or not. George W. Bush's administration wants its Americans to feel safe in the air, but that doesn't mean it wants American workers to feel any too safe in their jobs. On Jan. 9, Adm. James Loy, the undersecretary of transportation for security, denied the nation's 56,000 airport-security screeners the right to join a union and bargain collectively for higher pay and better working conditions. "Mandatory collective bargaining is not compatible with the flexibility required to wage war against terrorism," Loy said.

If the airport-security screeners feel they've been arbitrarily discriminated against, they're right. City police officers form unions and bargain collectively. So do the transit police at airports and train and bus stations. So do baggage handlers, pilots and flight attendants. So do the civilian employees of the Pentagon.

And it's not as if the baggage screeners have no reason to organize. Employees have complained of working shifts so long that their ability to detect signs of danger has diminished. Not surprisingly, the American Federation of Government Employees had embarked on a nationwide organizing campaign of screeners. But it was to keep this very thing from happen-

ing that the administration went to the wall in the fight over the homeland-security bill. For the White House, the issue was a twofer: It stuck it to unions and to Democrats, who, by opposing a bill that stripped workers of their rights, rendered themselves vulnerable to security demagoguery in the November elections.

Meanwhile, does anyone out there remember Norm Mineta? The liberal Democrat, who represented San Jose in Congress from 1975 through 1995 and was the lead House sponsor of the Japanese-American reparations act of 1988, has been Bush's secretary of transportation since the president took office. Mineta is an ac-

knowledgeable expert on a range of transportation issues, but nothing in his résumé remotely suggests he aspires to be the nation's No. 1 union buster. Apparently, however, that now comes with the job. Not that he formulated this policy—all policy, we now know, emanates from Karl Rove—but he is required to wield the ax.

It's a long way from winning justice for the internees at Manzanar. Norm, how bad do you need this job, anyway?

Keep a Straight Face

FROM A JAN. 7 NEW YORK Times article on the Bush administration's difficulties in

handling the Korean crisis: "Part of the reason that we don't want to get North Korea's problems in front of the [United Nations] Security Council too quickly, one senior [administration] official suggested today, 'is that the other Security Council members will be overwhelmed by too many problems at once. And these problems are different enough that you don't want one polluting the other.'"

Translation: If the council members have to discuss the immediacy of the North Korean threat and listen to our argument for a negotiated settlement there, they will be overwhelmed with laughter when we make our case for invading Iraq. ♦

The Labor Department Theory of Value

This administration's policies on anything that even touches workers run from the ridiculous to the ridiculous. Consider its Advisory Committee on Trade Policy, which Bush unveiled back on Dec. 9. The 32-member panel boasts two academics, one governor, one mayor and 28 representatives from business. No environmentalists. Not a single trade unionist. Good thing there's just one side to every question. (The committee's membership is also eloquent testimony to the clout of Teamster President Jim Hoffa and Carpenters President Doug McCarron, the dynamic duo of pro-Bush union

2002. But the Department of Labor has denied its D.C.-based workers that increase, though it has given it to its managerial employees. The department has informed its employees' local union that it will have to bargain for the increase, executive order or no. The union fears



Chao's chinless challenge

that the department wants to open up talks to force the union to make some unrelated concessions in order to win the increase that Clinton authorized.

Now, there's a Labor Department unafraid of new paradigms in labor-management relations—in this case, schooling its own workers in the joys of arbitrary management power

leaders whose constant fawning over the president has yielded their unions' members precisely nothing.)

Or consider the seemingly mundane issue of helping Washington-area federal employees get to work. In April 2000, Bill Clinton signed an executive order entitling all such employees to a monthly transit subsidy of no more than \$65, which was to increase to \$100 by January

and sheer anti-worker contempt. Some say that Labor Secretary Elaine Chao came to office addled by one particular of her marriage to Republican Senate Whip Mitch McConnell—her long and fruitless search for his chin. Others say she's just remaking her corner of the world in the image of Midland, Texas—which is all that Bush cabinet secretaries are really expected to do anyway. ♦

New Year, New Fear

Republicans play to the base while everyone else suffers.

BY MARY LYNN F. JONES

SHORTLY AFTER THE REPUBLICAN sweep of Congress in November, President Bush said he looked forward to working with lawmakers to “make our country a better and more compassionate place.” And when Sen. Bill Frist was elected majority leader in December, the Republican from Tennessee promised to “listen, to diagnose, to treat ... to heal,” and to focus particular attention on strengthening Medicare, lowering the number of uninsured and boosting the economy.

All worthy goals, but don't hold your breath. Just doing the math makes it highly unlikely that the Republicans, now in control of just about everything in Washington that matters, will come up with any programs to solve the health-care crisis for low- and moderate-income people, or any other pocketbook issues for the poor.

For starters, consider Bush's proposal to cut taxes by \$674 billion over a decade. Throw in the tens of billions of dollars it will take, at a minimum, to fight a war in Iraq. Couple that with already ballooning federal deficits and one has to ask where the money is going to come from for domestic social programs. Beyond the fiscal issues, the Republican agenda includes drilling for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, appointing more conservative judges to the courts and making it harder for women to receive abortions. These bills are aimed more at pleasing the conservative base than tackling social ills and enacting meaningful changes.

Let's start with health care. It's a top priority for Frist, a former heart and lung transplant surgeon, and for the White House. Both Republicans and Democrats recognize that this could be a key issue in the 2004 presidential election, particularly for elderly voters. Both sides are determined to reform the Medicare program [see Marcia Angell,

“Dr. Frist to the Rescue,” page 37] before it goes bust and to deliver a promised prescription-drug benefit. But the White House is expected to push a Medicare plan that would act more like private health insurance than the current fee-for-service approach. “That scares the hell out of those of who are Medicare supporters,” a House Democratic staffer says, adding that the Bush-Frist approach would effectively end Medicare as an entitlement program. Medicaid coverage could still help the poor, assuming state governments don't cut funding due to their budget shortfalls. But that's a huge assumption given the fiscal realities in most states these days. Low- and middle-income workers not covered by Medicaid would feel the pinch the most. Some Republican proposals would offer better coverage for seniors but require higher premiums. That means sick seniors who are wealthy would be able to afford better care than those who are poor. And because Bush has said he won't accept a prescription-drug package without Medicare reform, seniors who no longer want to have to choose between buying food and buying drugs may have to sign on to the administration's overall plan.

Republicans also say they want to reduce the number of uninsured Americans, whose numbers increased by 1.4 million in 2001 to roughly 41 million, by issuing tax credits to help them purchase health insurance. But health-care experts, such as Henry Aaron of the Brookings Institution, predict the effect of doling out such credits would be “negligible to negative.” Few people are likely to use the credits directly because they would be small. “You really couldn't buy much more than a bare-bones plan,” Aaron says. Worse, employers may use the credits as an excuse to drop their coverage of employees. And while the administration talks

about improving health-care coverage, the White House has a record of trying to reduce funding for programs that provide assistance to people with HIV and AIDS, and for community health centers, among other things.

BUSH KNOWS ALL TOO WELL WHAT happened the last time a president sought re-election amid a weak economy. His economic plan, aimed at making sure he doesn't share his father's fate, proposes to eliminate dividend taxes, accelerate tax-rate cuts, end the marriage penalty, increase the child-tax credit, enlarge the amount small businesses can write off for equipment expenditures and move more lower-income taxpayers into the 10 percent tax bracket. Some portions of the plan, such as the child-tax credit, were thrown in to rebut Democratic claims that the entire package is tilted toward the rich. But the fact is that wealthy Americans benefit disproportionately. As the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center pointed out, the 10 percent of U.S. taxpayers with incomes greater than \$100,000 would receive close to 60 percent of the benefit from the Bush tax cuts. It's hardly surprising that White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer told *The Wall Street Journal* that Bush “believes people should not be denied tax relief because they are successful. This is a classic difference between the two parties and we welcome it.”

For this president, tax cuts are a panacea for many of the problems facing the United States. But if the \$1.35 trillion tax cut two years ago didn't ease our economic woes, is a plan roughly half that size really going to do any better? And given the fact that the budget surplus disappeared after the 2001 tax cut, would it be wise to go further into debt? The Department of the Treasury was so worried about the package that it released a list of quotes from 19 “prominent economists and industry leaders” who support the plan. But there was no shortage of economists and political observers who said the plan was flawed. As Bruce Katz of the Brookings Institution says, “If you provide tax relief to the low and moderate end of the spectrum, you'll see more consumer spending in

the near term.” Of course, low- and moderate-income workers aren’t the Republicans’ base; wealthy ones are. Much of the Republican plan would go into effect after 2003, which raises the question: How much of Bush’s plan is really about providing a stimulus and how much is about helping the rich? As *The Wall Street Journal* noted in a headline the day after Bush unveiled his plan, “Bush Stimulus Package Needs Many Assumptions to Pan Out.”

It’s highly unlikely Bush will get everything he wants, and his advisers seemed to concede that the plan is a best-case scenario. House Democrats, by contrast, proposed a \$136 billion plan that actually seems geared toward giving the economy a quick shot in the arm; it has most of the tax breaks taking effect right away, including a tax rebate for workers, tax incentives for business investment and help for unemployed workers. “What our economy needs now is an immediate boost that will get people back to work, provide help to those who are hurting most and benefit the millions of middle-income families whose consumer spending has kept the economy afloat throughout the Bush recession,” Rep. Robert Matsui (D-Calif.) said.

But tax cuts aren’t the only way Republicans plan to reward their base this year. Lawmakers also plan to introduce legislation to outlaw partial-birth abortions, make it a separate crime to harm a fetus and fund abstinence programs. Pro-choice advocates expect Republicans to “drive very hard, very fast on their social agenda,” says Susanne Martinez, vice president for public policy at the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, who called this the most difficult time for pro-choice groups since *Roe v. Wade* was decided. “We’re preparing for it and assuming the worst,” she

said. The Republicans also want to spend more money on abstinence awareness to cut down on the rate of people on welfare (as if suggesting that stopping people from having sex is alone going to reduce the welfare rolls) and make it easier for religious organizations to win government contracts (so much for the separation between church and state).

They’re also expected to introduce a ban on cloning human embryos for research and to push for oil drilling in Alaska. Compare that with the Democrats’ agenda, which Senate Minority

Pickering, who comes from former Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott’s home state of Mississippi, has been accused of some of the same segregationist leanings as Lott. Meanwhile, the unemployment-benefit extension signed into law by Bush will help some who are out of work for a few months. But that gives liberals little solace. Jim Manley, a spokesman for Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), who worked closely with Bush on the 2001 education bill, said Kennedy is “very concerned” that the administration is unwilling to fund some of the programs that were included in the bill. As one longtime budget expert told me, Republicans “just don’t like social programs, period. Their compassion may be real talk, but it certainly isn’t money.”

The right wing will no doubt push Republicans in Congress aggressively during the next two years. With control of the House, Senate and White House, Republicans have “no excuses” for not getting things done, as freshman Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) recently said. The good news is that with a narrow margin and untested leadership in the Senate, Republicans will be limited in what they can do. The challenge for Democrats is to keep the pres-

sure on the opposition. Daschle plans to introduce a hate-crimes bill, ensuring that voters don’t soon forget Lott’s recent remarks. Kennedy has threatened a filibuster on some of the judicial nominations. And Democrats who worked with Bush on his last tax cut don’t appear as willing to cooperate this time. That kind of determination will be necessary for Democrats to stop the Bush agenda on Capitol Hill. Otherwise, it’s likely to be a very long two years in Washington. ♦

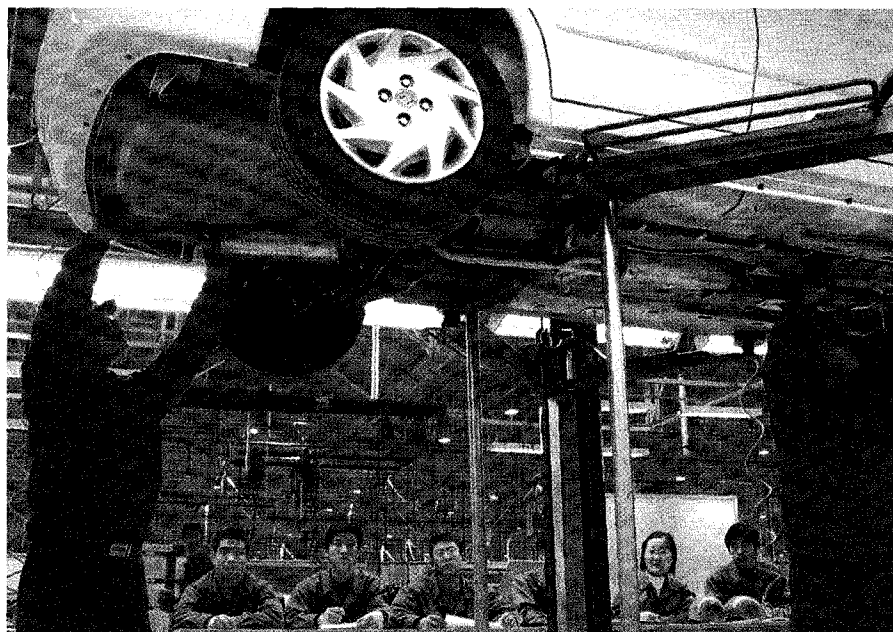
MARY LYNN F. JONES is *the Prospect’s* senior editor.



The Republican trifecta: (from left) Frist, Hastert and Bush

Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) unveiled recently. His priorities include increasing education funding, raising the minimum wage and enacting a prescription-drug benefit—one that doesn’t end Medicare as we know it. It’s an agenda that actually focuses on the needs of most Americans, rather than catering to the few.

ON THE OPENING DAY OF THE 108th Congress, Bush wasted no time in renominating several judges, including Charles Pickering Sr. and Priscilla Owen, whom the Democratic-led Senate had rejected.



As General Motors goes, so goes the People's Republic.

Trading With a Low-Wage Tiger

What happens to everyone else when China sucks up so much of the world's economic growth?

BY BARRY C. LYNN

WHEN ROBERT MAO describes the fantastic manufacturing opportunities his company sees in China, he speaks with mixed feelings. "For the first time in the modern era," he marvels, "we have an inexhaustible reservoir of good, trainable labor." But Mao, who as president and CEO of Nortel Networks China has worked in the region for 20 years, also worries about what that means for China's neighbors. For the foreseeable future, he says, almost all new investment by Nortel suppliers will go to China and not to other Asian countries. So, too, he expects, will most major investments by other global manufacturers. "What can Taiwan, Malaysia and the Philippines do?" he asks. "They offer pretty much the same degree of technological sophistication as China but they are more expensive and lack the scale. What will they do?"

His concern is well-founded. In 2001,

China absorbed 75 percent of all foreign direct investment into Asia's developing economies, a complete reversal of the ratio of 10 years ago. Indeed, almost all economies—from Cambodia to the United States—have by now lost some industrial activity to China. And with China's workers earning less than one-third as much as their counterparts in, say, Brazil or Thailand, with tens of millions of underemployed Chinese industrial workers waiting in the wings and with hundreds of millions of farmworkers lined up behind them, such losses are very likely to continue.

Press attention has mostly focused on the plight of the richest Asian nations—particularly Japan, where think tanks and government agencies, recycling a phrase that Americans once used to use to describe their loss of manufacturing to Tokyo, report a "hollowing out" of the economy as manufacturing moves to China. Taiwan has also been in the news:

Fear of China as an economic competitor recently edged toward panic following government approval of the first mainland investments by the country's gaudiest industrial success, the giant Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company.

But the economic stakes for developing nations are, relatively speaking, much higher. Mexico, Malaysia and Thailand—and, to a lesser extent, South Africa, Poland and Brazil—now find themselves competing with China for shares of the U.S. and European markets, and even for a place in their home markets, as well as for direct investment and capital. The effects can add up quickly. Mexican government figures show that in 2001, that country lost 5 percent of its manufacturing jobs, more than 580,000 positions, largely to China. More than 350 maquiladoras, many of which supplied parts to foreign companies, shut their doors as orders went to Chinese vendors instead; and the job loss was even worse among factories in Mexico that were directly owned and operated by multinationals. Among those that moved production from Mexico to China were Philips, Sanyo and Sony.

The same thing is happening in Southeast Asia. Singapore frets as Hitachi, Sanyo and Philips transfer high-tech work to China; Malaysia wrings its hands as Dell moves personal-computer production from Penang to Xiamen; and the Philippines watches helplessly as new foreign direct investment falls by half in a year while NEC, a longtime resident manufacturer, relocates a hard-drive plant to Shanghai and Toshiba moves PC production to Hangzhou. So strong and persistent is the investment slowdown in Southeast Asia that some academics are starting to connect the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998 to the ascension of China.

The allure of China to the big manufacturers is not just its low wages, lack of unions and shocking absence of citizens' rights (Mexico looks downright Scandinavian by comparison). A recent survey of managers at Japanese multinationals showed that most believe China's workers are better-educated and harder-working than their counterparts in Southeast Asia. In addition, water and power are

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

highly subsidized in China, and because Beijing will take from its people to give to industry, supplies are virtually guaranteed. China's currency, the yuan, is less volatile than, say, the peso. Perhaps most important, China's remarkably deep base of industrial supplies and services is unmatched in the developing world.

Jim Sacherman, senior vice president of Flextronics, a firm that manufactures electronic components and sells them to companies such as Cisco and Ericsson, says his staff recently identified more than 300 cable suppliers in Shenzhen, China. By contrast, they found only five in Guadalajara, Mexico, where Flextronics also operates factories. The longer China remains politically stable, Sacherman says, the harder it will be to stay away. "The fact is, our customers want us there, and the supply base is becoming so mature that you can basically buy anything you need," he says. "It's very much a snowball effect."

Scariest of all for most developing countries is the speed of China's technological advance. The Asian giant has quickly become not only the world's premier location for labor-intensive work but also a top choice for some of the most high-tech activities. The progress has been so swift that it has raised concern even in Washington. Last spring, the General Accounting Office reported that semiconductor production in China already had leaped to within a half-generation of the most advanced U.S.-based operations (contrary to U.S. policy, which calls for maintaining a two-generation lead).

Many Southeast Asian governments are left dusting off their sightseeing brochures from the 1980s, when yentoting Japanese vacationers were one of the main props for the region's economies. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who for 20 years has been an outspoken proponent of state-led industrialization, recently spoke in Tokyo of his hope for an "influx of Chinese tourists."

FOR NOW THERE MAY BE LITTLE else the semi-industrialized countries can do. In July, Mexican Secretary of Economy Luis Ernesto Derbez said his country would register a

complaint against China before the World Trade Organization (WTO), but few other countries appear willing to join the effort. India, long one of China's main critics on trade issues, has actually moved closer to Beijing over the last year. And the Southeast Asian nations have been quiet for reasons running the gamut from the pro-China tilt among the ethnic-Chinese industrial elites in Singapore and the Philippines to the unwieldiness of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the forum where these countries have traditionally coordinated trade policy. By all indications, the Southeast Asian nations intend to take much the same passive stance toward China that most of them once took toward Japan. During the many years when Japanese multinationals dominated the region's trade, Tokyo imagined itself as the lead goose in a

cide on the legality of subsidies provided to manufacturers by the central or provincial governments of China, or of any other nation. For years, global corporations and developing countries worked in tandem to deny the organization such power. Both groups feared that the definition of "subsidy" would be extended to include such factors as, say, a poor country's lack of environmental rules—and this would allow protectionists in Europe and America to keep out other countries' products.

Such concerns made sense in the 1980s, when the WTO was conceived, a time when most mid-sized nations still had national industries to project and defend. Trade today, however, is a very different beast. Most cross-border movement of manufactured goods now takes place within global companies, and national

Last year Mexico lost 5 percent of all its manufacturing jobs, more than 580,000 positions, due largely to manufacturers moving to China.

V-formation; if all the other geese followed along, the thinking went, everyone would get to the same pond together. The governments of Southeast Asia seem eager to convince themselves that the only thing now changing is the lead goose.

Malaysia's Mahathir may have provided the best explanation for the region's diffident mood in his Tokyo speech, which seemed to come down to a weighing of risks. China may be a fearsome economic competitor for Malaysia, he implied, but it would be an even more fearsome political foe, especially in the struggle he sees unfolding between China and the Western industrial nations. To illustrate the dangers he sees for his people, Mahathir resorted to an old proverb, saying, "We all know that when two elephants fight, the grass and the animals underneath will get trampled."

economies are increasingly shaped by the self-fulfilling consensus among these global corporations that the Philippines, for instance, is the place to package semiconductors, that Thailand is good for sophisticated automobile components and that Mexico is best for the assembly of heavy products headed to the U.S. market. No one has yet designed a model for achieving national economic development in this new industrial landscape.

At a recent press conference, Derbez announced that Mexico will soon start demanding new concessions from manufacturers that wish to operate in the country. "What we have to say to them is, 'Well, I brought you in, so you have to help me develop Mexican industry. More than that, I want you to help me develop Mexican technology,'" he said, following pretty much the same script that China began to use more than a decade ago. But that approach, too, is unpromising in today's changed global economy. In 1990, China was dealing with a haphazard array of foreign firms largely unfamiliar with overseas production; Mexico now faces

YET IF THE CHANCES OF CONCERTED action by the semi-industrialized nations are slim, the chances of a helpful WTO response are even slimmer. The WTO is simply not designed to de-

consolidated global industrial networks that see little reason to accede to the demands of any one country.

Today it is the global companies that are making the demands—that host countries devalue their currencies, subsidize electricity for businesses, lower corporate taxes, hold down wages. And so much for the promise that opening their doors to free trade would one day drive wages in these countries higher, that it would induce investors to upgrade plants and equipment, that their economies would actually develop.

Sooner or later, the nations now watching their economic hopes drain away to China are likely to conclude that the real culprit isn't Beijing but Washington,

which labored so mightily to create this global economic structure. Indeed, with the inept steel tariffs and fat-filled farm bill that the Bush administration pushed through in 2002—scoring domestic political points by raising new barriers to the U.S. import market—free trade is already looking to many like an elaborate game of bait and switch. As Mexican economist Rogelio Romero de la O says, “People in the street don’t even know where China is. But they do know NAFTA and the United States, and these will be very good targets when someone decides to make trade into a political issue.” ♦

BARRY C. LYNN is the former editor of *Global Business magazine*.



Getting ready for smallpox, both the vaccine and the disease

The ABCs of Smallpox

Which methods of treatment make sense and why

BY MARC SIEGEL

MEDICINE DEPENDS ON probability: the probability of a disease occurring, the likelihood that it will spread or can be prevented, the odds of a side effect resulting from a tool of treatment or

prevention. A risk-benefit analysis evaluates the risk of a disease versus what doctors can do to prevent or treat it. With smallpox, the greatest problem recently has been an exaggerated perception of its risk. The public is divided into two camps: those who are afraid of

smallpox and those who are afraid of the vaccine.

Smallpox is a debilitating disease that leaves behind disfiguring scars. But it is containable by public health measures that have been in place for more than 100 years. When untreated, it has a 30 percent mortality rate. It spreads by airborne saliva when a person already has a fever as well as obvious skin lesions, so it's easily quarantined. Furthermore, giving the live virus vaccine to victims after infection can reduce the mortality rate to less than 10 percent. And a new oral form of cidofovir, an anti-viral drug that's proven somewhat effective at treating and preventing the spread of smallpox, shows great promise.

For people over 30, some residual immunity probably remains from vaccination in early childhood. According to Dr. Douglas Zeiger, an infectious-disease expert at the New York University School of Medicine, this lingering “herd immunity”—the idea that when a large portion of a group is immune to a disease, it's less likely that an infected person will come into contact with a susceptible victim—“may well slow down the spread of smallpox if it were to occur” in the United States.

Though it is likely that smallpox has spread from its “secure” place in a Russian laboratory to rogue states such as Iraq, it presents a remote threat. If smallpox were to occur at all, it would probably be in isolated cases that could be limited by containment. However, as David Goldston, the House Committee on Science's chief of staff, points out, the danger hasn't been clarified yet. “It's difficult to weigh the risks versus the benefits since the government hasn't given out information about the risks, even to the panel advising it on vaccination policy,” he says.

Dr. Martin Blaser, an infectious-disease specialist and chief of medicine at the NYU School of Medicine, notes, “The old smallpox vaccine offers excellent protection. It is the reason why smallpox is no longer circulating in the world.” This vaccine uses a related virus (vaccinia) that is much weaker than smallpox but that may cause or exacerbate skin conditions or brain swelling, or

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

be spread if the vaccinated spot is touched. Furthermore, any vaccine using a live virus is not safe for someone who is pregnant or has a compromised immune system. These groups constitute a significant percentage of our population and must be protected. Unfortunately, many of those who are newly pregnant or immuno-compromised aren't aware of their condition.

Still, the old vaccine is useful in certain populations. Those in the military, especially soldiers going into Iraq, are a reasonable group to vaccinate because their risk of exposure outweighs the risk of the vaccine. The same is true for first responders, the emergency medical personnel who would be first on the scene if a smallpox outbreak occurred in the United States.

Hospitals are at the center of the controversy. Some want the old vaccine; others are refusing it. Though the risks of the old vaccine are small, many reluctant hospitals and their employees appear to be scared by the possible side effects, which publicity has magnified. They also may be bolstered by the reasonable belief that there would still be time to vaccinate hospital personnel if a case of smallpox occurred.

At the same time, the public is riddled with unrealistic ideas concerning smallpox. In mid-December, the *New England Journal of Medicine* released a survey showing that 65 percent of Americans believe that everyone should be vaccinated now. Fears drive those numbers, but the fact is that smallpox is containable by public health measures and vaccination, and has never become as widespread as, say, influenza. Nor has smallpox been endemic to a region the way polio and influenza were in New York City in the early 20th century. Still, smallpox is disfiguring and potentially deadly. When 1,600 cases broke out in Boston between 1901 and 1903, 270 people died. It is not a disease to be taken lightly.

Almost entirely lost in the debate has been the newer inactivated virus vaccines, in which the virus doesn't cause side effects. One of these has been given safely to more than 300,000 people in Japan. Another has been given to 100,000

people in Turkey. The National Institutes of Health has 100 people enrolled in a clinical trial of this type of vaccine; that study should be completed within a year. Interestingly, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Web site lists these facts, but then goes on to call this vaccine untested, as though the only tests that matter involve Americans. But there is no reason to believe that this vaccine couldn't be used, at least in low-risk populations.

At the same time, work is proceeding on a recombinant vaccine in which viral DNA is piggybacked onto user-friendly bacteria. Recombinant vaccines are generally the safest and are used for hepatitis and other viruses. It is likely that one will

be developed for smallpox, further altering the probabilistic equations that public health officials use when determining if a population should be vaccinated.

Accurate information and an informed perspective could bring the public's fear of smallpox more in line with its real risk. Exaggerating the side effects of a largely safe and effective vaccine is not the best way to treat the fear of the virus. But immunizing everyone just to manage the public's panic would be even worse. ♦

MARC SIEGEL is an associate professor of medicine at New York University. He contributed to a U.S. Senate report on the handling of 2001's bioterrorism scare.

A Tale of Two Cities

Davos and Porto Alegre square off on the global economy.

BY JEFF FAUX


TWO POLITICAL MOVEMENTS representing distinct visions of the global economy will hold their annual conventions the last week of January. The World Economic Forum—an organization of some 1,000 multinational corporations—will meet in Davos, a picture book ski resort in the Swiss Alps. The forum was organized 30 years ago to provide a discreet hideaway where businessmen-without-borders could socialize and strategize with one another and selected heads of state. Over the years, Davos has become less an exclusive retreat to do business and more a quasi-public conference on how to make the world safe for multinational capital. This year, more than 500 government officials, media pundits, leaders of churches and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Red Cross, and “leading thinkers” will share cocktails and ideas with the captains of global capitalism.

Meanwhile, some 7,000 miles away, a much larger group of environmental, labor and other social activists will gather in sunny Porto Alegre, a bustling com-

mercial city in the flat, cattle-raising landscape of southeastern Brazil. The World Social Forum was first organized in 2000 as a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum. Porto Alegre was chosen because it is in the Third World and because the local government—run by Brazil's Workers' Party, whose leader, known as Lula, has just been elected president—offered to host it. Two years ago, 4,000 registered delegates showed up, and another 16,000 people came to listen to the discussions. Last year there were 14,000 registrants and 35,000 observers. For this year's conference, organizers had 24,000 registrants by Dec. 1.

Although the party of Porto Alegre has larger conventions, the party of Davos remains in power almost everywhere. Its neoliberal model, which makes freedom to invest the supreme political value, has been for 20 years the agenda of the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, the U.S. Department of the Treasury and other governing institutions of the global marketplace.

But inside the cozy chalets of Davos,



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the triumphalism of the past is likely to be muted this year. The world's economy is entering the third year of economic slowdown, and there's no consensus among the multinational elites on how to revive it. Japan remains in the grip of its deflationary spiral, tight-money central bankers are choking Europe's growth and much of the developing world is staggering under unpayable debts. The prospect of war in Iraq and at least a short-term unsettling of global oil prices add to the jitters. Doubts about the Bush administration's competence notwithstanding, Davos looks to the United States for salvation—hoping that U.S. consumers will continue to defy the laws of economic gravity by spending more than they earn in order to absorb the rest of the world's excess production.

The uneasiness among the Davos constituency reflects more than business-cycle anxiety. Despite the rapid U.S. expansion of the 1990s, the neoliberal model has failed to deliver on its promises to accelerate Third World growth, improve the distribution of income, and usher in an era of freedom and democracy. Indeed, almost half of the world's 50 poorest countries saw a drop in their per capita incomes over the decade.

Misgivings can now be found even at U.S. universities, where thousands of foreign economics and business students have been trained in neoliberal thought. As *The Wall Street Journal* recently observed, "After the economic and financial distress that has hit Mexico, Asia, Russia, Argentina and Brazil in the past decade, the current generation [of foreign students] is absorbing a sobering new message about globalization and the trade-offs and turmoil that can come with it."

The response at corporate Davos has been to blame the customer, not the product. The theme of this year's conference is that ordinary people are plagued by a lack of trust in the world's companies, governments and other established institutions. A press release warns that unless trust is somehow restored, the world could see "greater system instability and a growing mandate for NGOs and new political parties."

This global distrust of established in-

stitutions that brings heartburn to the party of Davos brings hope to the party of Porto Alegre. It is a sign that the world's ordinary people are waking up to the failures of global laissez-faire. Davos looks to George W. Bush; Porto Alegre looks to Lula. The victory of Lula—an ex-labor leader jailed under the 20-year military dictatorship with which many of the Davos member companies were happy to do business—is Porto Alegre's answer to the establishment media that dismiss their protest movement as kooky and without clout.



The other summit site: Porto Alegre, Brazil

Lula's victory certainly helps make the case for the Porto Alegre theme, "Another World Is Possible." But the vision of that other world is still incomplete. There is no consensus among the many disparate groups that fill the hundreds of workshops and seminars of their convention. The emphasis on self-sufficiency, decentralization and autonomy for indigenous tribes does not necessarily resonate with the majority of the world's impoverished people, who see their problem as lack of access to First World goods and services.

In Latin America, for example, where the neoliberal model is widely discredited, populist leaders remain intimidated by the threat of a capital strike from the world's financial markets. After a year of financial meltdown, Argentina is still on

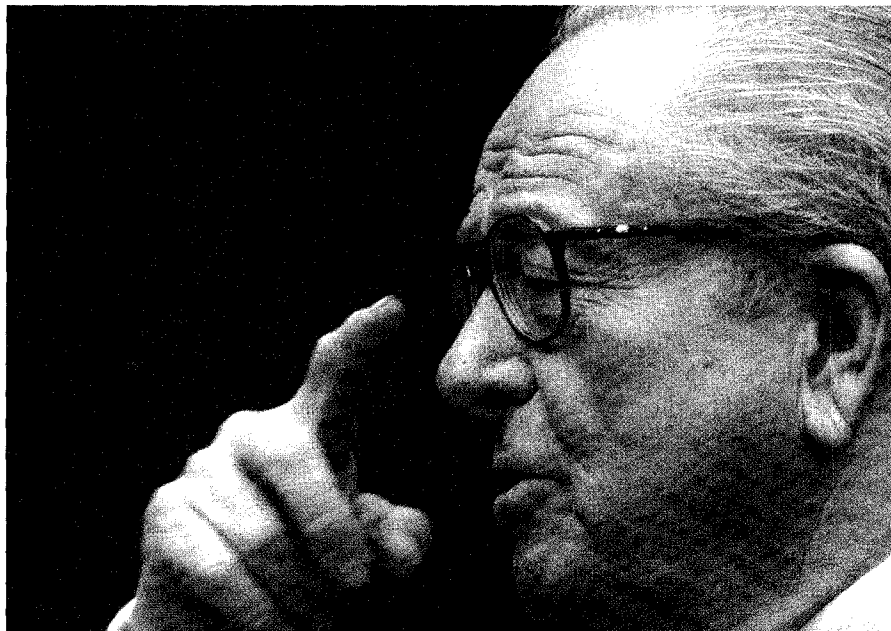
IMF life supports. In Venezuela, populist President Hugo Chavez is being pushed to the wall by a shutdown of the oil industry. Even in Brazil, Lula has had to reassure Wall Street by appointing conservatives to run the central bank and other economic ministries.

Indeed, the shadow of a third model—China—falls over both Davos and Porto Alegre. For Davos, China is a multinational corporation's dream: practically infinite sources of cheap, docile labor and a government that will use force to keep it that way. Yet China's amalgam of pri-

vate greed and state power threatens to create corporate competitors whose market clout even the U.S. oil and military industrial complexes might not be able to match.

The threat to the party of Porto Alegre is that the socially repressive Chinese model—what has been called Market Leninism—may turn out to be an attractive alternative for the desperate Third World, resulting in a future of more centralization, more environmental degradation and much less democracy. History's sun may well be setting on Davos, but it has not yet risen on Porto Alegre. ♦

JEFF FAUX is the founding president and current Distinguished Fellow of the Economic Policy Institute.



Not as mighty as the sword: Jean-Marie Le Pen

Who's Right Now?

Europe's far-right resurgence fizzles out.

BY STEVEN HILL

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AMERICAN journals—mainstream and progressive both—were filled with alarm about the rise of the far right in Europe. But recent election results in Germany, Sweden, Austria and elsewhere make clear that the panic button was pushed prematurely.

In Germany, the coalition of Social Democrats and the Greens eked out a close victory in September. In Sweden, the ruling Social Democrats scored an unexpected victory, handily beating the predictions of the pollsters. Recent elections also saw center-left governments take the reins in Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic.

Meanwhile, the fortunes of the far right have fallen on harder times. Following the media frenzy over Jean-Marie Le Pen's success at making it to a runoff in the French presidential election, the anti-immigrant zealot drew just 18 percent support at the polls, and his party failed to win a single seat in the balloting for the National Assembly. In Austria,

Jorg Haider, the personification of resurgent European ultranationalism for the better part of the last decade, received his comeuppance when, in recent elections, his Freedom Party received less than half the popular vote that it had pulled down in the previous vote. And after a stunning performance in the Netherlands by the assassinated Pim Fortuyn's party, bickering among its members led to the collapse of the new government late last year. Fortuyn's party could virtually disappear after elections are held on Jan. 22.

Any assessment of the seesaw fortunes of the right in Europe must begin with the recognition that the entire political spectrum there is far to the left of our own. Europeans still have free health care for all, from the cradle to the grave; free education through the university level; comparatively generous retirement for their elderly; and an average of five weeks paid vacation, plus more sick leave, parental leave and a shorter workweek with comparable wages for workers. (French workers, with their 35-hour

workweek, toil on average nearly a full day less per week than their U.S. counterparts, who work on average 42 hours per week.) Social spending in Europe runs some 50 percent above that in the United States. Environmental, food-safety and labor laws, meanwhile, are the envy of activists in the United States.

In short, the European political center is where the American left would love to be. Europe's famously generous welfare state is still alive and mostly well, though under attack by globalization and corporations that would like to bury it and make Europe more like the United States. And it is in this context that one must understand the recent roller-coaster ride of the European far right.

The leaders and parties of the European right do not for the most part seek to overturn the European welfare state, or to put an end to a proactive role for government activism or regulation. On the contrary, they accept the need and legitimacy of this kind of governmental role far more than most U.S. Democrats do. Any Democratic Party candidate or leader who espoused the welfare-state policies of the European far right would likely be hounded by centrist Democrats into a backbench seat—or retirement.

Indeed, the far-right parties attained their recent electoral successes in some European nations by defending governmental benefits and regulations that the social-democratic and center-left parties had been rolling back, in the manner of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, for the past few years. In the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, for example, the various far-right parties demanded such things as a reinforced commitment to comprehensive and quality public health care, elderly care, mass transit and subsidized housing. They also emphasized the protection of the public-pension and education systems.

BY MANY MEASURES, THE FAR RIGHT in Europe has not been nearly as successful as the far right in the United States. Here, fundamentalist Christian Tom DeLay—a critic of the separation of church and state who has compared the Environmental Protection Agency to the Gestapo—cruises to re-

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

election in Texas time after time, and as the new majority leader, is now one heart attack away from becoming speaker of the House. From his perch atop the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Jesse Helms held veto power over much of American foreign policy during the 1980s and 1990s. David Duke came much closer to winning the governor's mansion in Louisiana than France's Le Pen ever did to winning real regional power. And Trent Lott—well, you know about Trent Lott.

While the parties and leaders of the European far right have long supported health care for their countrymen, the leaders of the American right—mainstream as well as far—have consistently opposed universal coverage. Their ideology has reams of excuses for why it's perfectly acceptable that 45 million Americans, many of them children, have no health coverage, or why spiraling education costs have shut out many of their countrymen's children from quality education. And like the parties of the European far right, American mainstream parties are not above bombastic, xenophobic rhetoric or policy, as anyone who recalls Pete Wilson and Dianne Feinstein's 1994 anti-immigrant campaigns can attest.

The partial renaissance of the European right is also a function of the swing of the political pendulum from right to left and back again. The center-right political parties dominated European governments throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Then the various center-left and social-democratic parties prevailed, primarily because the right had finally run out of steam and alienated enough swing voters that a Third Way left supplanted it. Now the pendulum is swinging back, and it has certainly received a special shove from nativist sentiments unleashed in the aftermath of September 11.

Moreover, the influx of immigrants in many European nations is heavy. Germany has a greater percentage of foreign-born persons than the self-professed "nation of immigrants," the United States. Holland, a nation of 16 million, has 1 million immigrants. Austria—with 8 million people, it's a little less populous than New York City—has been

the crossroads in recent years for migrants fleeing various ethnic conflicts.

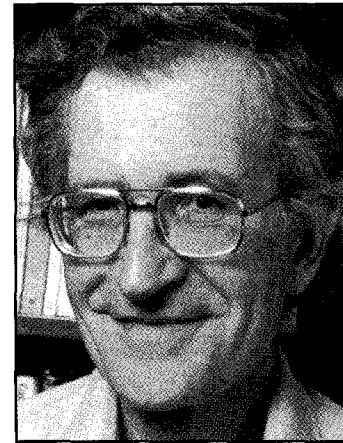
Unfortunately, the far right has often been the only sector addressing—prejudicially and demagogically—the hard questions concerning not only immigration and crime but also the generous European welfare state, and how it is being affected by globalization. As one European commentator has written, "The Social, Christian and Liberal Democrats have left discussion of the continent's most important issues in the hands of obscure demagogues, amateurs and con artists." The legitimate question of how rapidly the most generous of nations can absorb and incorporate the immigrant influx has been shunted off to the right. According to one far-right leader in Denmark, "It is very difficult to have a welfare state if the borders are open. The responsibility and the will to pay a lot of tax, as we do, must be there." That's not reaction, that's common sense.

The reaction, of course, is there, too. As in the United States, racism and xenophobia are very much present in Europe. The idea of European society as a "melting pot" or "rainbow quilt" is alien and new, and undoubtedly there will be strains for some time to come. But for the American media and punditry—right, left and mainstream—to portray the situation as one in which Nazis and fascists are gaining a real foothold in Europe is erroneous and hyperbolic.

As American politics and media have been engulfed the last two decades by a right-wing, free-market conservatism, the real Europe emerges more and more as the most viable countervailing force—a mainstay of social democracy, government regulation, political and media pluralism, and proportional representation. Playing the fascist card too quickly undermines this vital European model and contributes to the conservative agenda of those who wish to attack Europe as the ideological opposition to a free-market United States. ♦

STEVEN HILL is senior analyst for the Center for Voting and Democracy and the author of a new book, *Fixing Elections: The Failure of America's Winner-Take-All Politics*.

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Stop the privatization: protesters in Mexico City

A Charged Atmosphere

Mexican unions block Fox's campaign to privatize electricity.

BY DAVID BACON

IF THE PROPOSALS FOR PRIVATIZING Mexico's nationalized electrical system bear an eerie resemblance to California's disastrous experiment in deregulation, it should come as no surprise. The proposals, after all, share some of the same authors. In fact, as Jeffrey Skilling and Ken Lay were setting up shadow corporations to hide Enron's huge U.S. losses in 2001, other Enron executives found time to hobnob with Mexican politicians and design projects in cooperation with that country's industrial elite.

Enron executives advised incoming President Vicente Fox on energy policy during his transition period. Since Fox took office in 2000, a slew of power companies, many of them U.S.-based, have gone on a construction spree in Mexico in anticipation of legislation that will privatize the nation's electric-power industry, which has been nationalized for the past four decades. On April 4, 2002, Enron Energia Industrial de Mexico received a license from Mexico's Electricity Regulatory

Commission to build a 245-megawatt plant in partnership with a number of major Mexican companies, including a number of Monterrey-based industrialists who've had longstanding relationships with their Texas counterparts.

Bechtel Enterprises, the multinational construction giant based in San Francisco, partnered with Shell Generating Ltd. to set up Interger Aztec Energy and build a plant generating 750 megawatts near Mexicali. Two-thirds of the power will be sold in Mexico; the remainder will be exported to California. Sempra Energy Resources, a San Diego power generator that figured in the state's power meltdown last year, is building another power station near Mexicali. Its 600 megawatts will all be sent to the United States, and the gas for its boilers will come from the United States in a Sempra-built pipeline, making the plant the first true energy maquiladora.

Controversy over the rapid growth of private power generation in Mexico boiled over last year when Fox intro-

duced legislation to privatize the industry. Those proposals have become so controversial that Fox may have lost the votes in the Mexican Congress needed to pass them. A former Coca-Cola executive, Fox is allied with the Monterrey industrialists and their U.S. energy partners. His proposals carry the blessing of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which have been urging the privatization of Mexican industry for more than a dozen years. Not surprisingly, another powerful Texan, President George W. Bush, is a longtime supporter of building U.S.-owned power plants south of the border.

In the United States, a similar alliance of corporate and political forces steamrolled all opposition to deregulated, private-sector power generation—at least until California's experience with privatization became such a manifest debacle. In Mexico, however, an alliance of progressive organizations and old-guard nationalists has thus far managed to thwart Fox's campaign.

The key institution that has stopped privatization in its tracks is the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME). At the end of September, the union and its allies brought 50,000 people into Mexico City's main square, the Zocalo, to protest Fox's plans. The union vowed to distribute 10 million leaflets urging rejection.

It wasn't the first confrontation between the union and the forces of neoliberal reform. In 1999, Fox's predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo, also proposed privatizing electricity. The union formed the National Front of Resistance to the Privatization of the Electrical Industry, collected 2.3 million signatures on petitions in three weeks and brought a million angry capital dwellers into the streets. Zedillo was defeated, marking the first time a privatization initiative in Mexico had not succeeded.

In Mexico, two state-owned power companies provide electricity. The Federal Electrical Commission (CFE) brings power to all of the country except Mexico City and part of central Mexico, which is supplied by the Power and Light Company. The SME, the union at the Power and Light Company, is one of the oldest and most democratic in Mexico.

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTO

The SME charges that Fox's plan is a giveaway to the top 1 percent of Mexican users—the big companies that consume 70 percent of the nation's energy. That should sound familiar to Californians, as the original deregulation plan drafted by Pacific Gas and Electric and some of the state's largest corporations also proposed to allow the largest power consumers to opt out of the system, leaving residential users and small businesses holding the bag. The SME warns that under Fox's plan, small-scale users would shoulder all of the expenses of maintaining the transmission grid and the distribution system. The union fears that the two existing power companies would lose most of their revenue and go bankrupt. Adding fuel to the fire, Fox proposes to entice private companies to build generating plants; his plan is to finance them using the national pension fund (the equivalent of Social Security).

Opponents say both national companies would likely be sold off once they become bankrupt, or they'd be replaced in the market by foreign-owned firms. New owners would increase profits by raising rates for small-scale customers while cutting wages, laying off workers, tearing up union contracts and holding down expenses on maintenance. The opponents are not just issuing doomsday predictions—they describe the bitter experience at Mexico's railroads, copper mines, airlines and other once-state-owned businesses privatized over the last decade.

TO OLDER MEXICANS, FOX'S PROPOSAL brings back bad memories of the era before nationalization. In 1960, the then-private, foreign owners of Mexico's power system wanted a big rate increase. They pressured the government by threatening to stop bringing lines into rural areas and building new generating capacity. But then-President Gustavo Diaz Ordaz nationalized the companies instead. Diaz's action was very popular, and in line with Mexico's most historic nationalization—of oil, in 1936.

In fact, national ownership of electricity is not just a matter of rates and jobs but a symbol of Mexico's independence from the United States. "We don't just look at this as workers but as

Mexicans," says Ramon Pacheco, the electrical union's secretary for external relations. "Yes, we'd lose our contract and jobs, and the company would go bankrupt. But this is about more than that—it's about the direction our country is taking."

Such popular opposition prevented the inclusion of the electrical and oil industries in the NAFTA negotiations. But in 1992, then-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari allowed private companies, including foreign ones, to build and operate plants in Mexico so long as they consumed or exported all the energy they produced—or sold it to the Federal Electrical Commission. According to Jesus Navarrete, a leader of Mexico's other electrical workers union, the Sole Union of Electrical Workers of the Mexican Republic (SUTERM), almost all new government construction of power plants halted after 1992; private construction, meanwhile, surged ahead. In addition to Enron, Semptra and Intergeren, 23 other foreign companies have been granted building permits in Mexico.

One of Fox's principal arguments for privatization, therefore, is that the national constitution needs to be changed to legalize what already exists. Energy Secretary Luis Tellez says that Mexico needs to add 22,000 megawatts to its present 35,000-watt capacity, and that only foreign investors can come up with the \$50 billion required to add that capacity. Navarrete and others, however, point out that cogeneration between the CFE and the oil monopoly Pemex alone could generate 9,000 new megawatts.

A knowledgeable authority on the U.S. side of the border is skeptical of Mexico's drive toward privatization. Carl Wood, a member of the California Public Utilities Commission, says, "It's crazy for Mexico to be doing this. Mexico is blessed with lots of energy resources. But this proposal accommodates the needs of the large consumers without meeting those of the public, and sticking the cost of old technology with consumers. That was always the root of California's deregulation problems."

Nevertheless, Fox's argument swayed not only his own party, the conservative National Action Party, but also the leaders of the Party of the Institutionalized

Revolution (PRI), which governed Mexico for 71 years before Fox's election. In May, the Mexican congress passed a resolution opposing any changes to the constitution that would make privatization possible. The PRI took a similar position in its own national meeting. But after Fox invited PRI leaders Roberto Madrazo and Elba Esther Gordillo to the presidential residence of Los Pinos for a late-night snack last September, they announced that they'd give his proposal serious consideration. The PRI has 40 percent of the votes in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, and Fox's National Action Party has another 40 percent. If Madrazo and Gordillo can hold their members, Fox's scheme has more than the required two-thirds majority.

But some of the PRI's most conservative yet nationalist leaders, including its former Chairman Manuel Bartlett, have organized vocal opposition. In fact, there may now be just enough PRI numbers to deny Fox the supermajority he needs. Bartlett and many PRI leaders are historically and currently linked to many of Mexico's old-guard, machine-dominated unions (including SUTERM), which also oppose privatization. "Look at the energy chaos in California," he declared. "Do they want to sell the American failure to us?" Bartlett introduced an alternative bill that would ban any increase in the 10 percent of current generation presently provided by private companies.

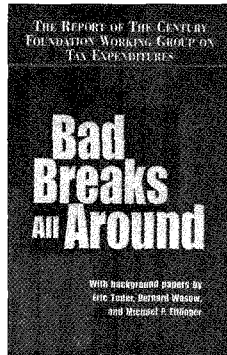
An alliance of the SME, the National Union of Workers (Mexico's new independent union confederation), the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution and nationalist elements in the PRI have all vowed to cooperate in staging a mass protest.

The campaign to privatize has become a de facto referendum on the direction of Mexico's economic development. Either the Fox government will succeed in finally burying the last and biggest remnants of Mexico's old nationalist development policy or it will suffer a defeat that may make it possible to recover a road toward national economic independence. ♦

DAVID BACON is a photojournalist and an associate editor at Pacific News Service.

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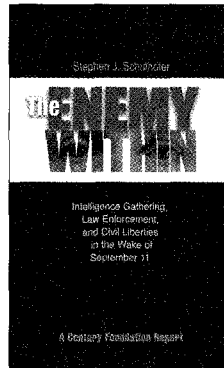


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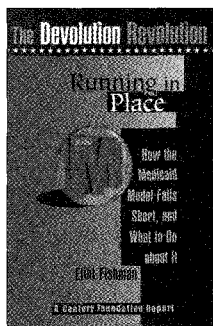


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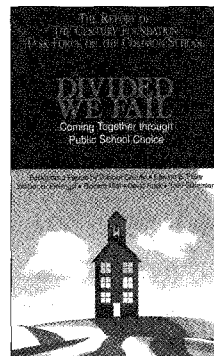


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Evildoer

George W. Bush just can't stop pushing more harmful tax cuts for the rich.

BY ROBERT S. MCINTYRE

IF, LIKE OUR PRESIDENT AND VICE PRESIDENT, YOU strongly believe that cutting taxes leads to higher tax revenues, the past year and a half must have been very disappointing. Despite the huge tax cut enacted in the spring of 2001, personal income-tax collections have plummeted since George W. Bush took office, dropping from 10.1 percent of the economy in fiscal 2000 to 9.6 percent in fiscal 2001 to only 8 percent in fiscal 2002. But, sadly, dashed hopes haven't led to second thoughts. On the contrary, Bush has decided that our economy is lagging because his 2001 tax cut simply wasn't big enough. So now he wants to increase it—by more than half.

Bush's original 2001 tax-cut plan will cost \$1.35 trillion over this decade, or \$1.6 trillion including interest. The president puts the 10-year price tag on his new tax-cut package at another \$674 billion—\$900 billion with interest. That, plus Bush's \$114 billion in corporate tax cuts enacted a year ago, brings his hoped-for tax cuts to a total of \$2.6 trillion—so far. Absent a supply-side miracle, Bush seems willing to condemn our country to huge budget deficits forever as long as taxes on the best-off Americans go down.

What does Bush have in store for us this time? In the short run, his latest gift to the wealthiest Americans involves speeding up the income-tax rate cuts enacted in 2001, which otherwise aren't scheduled to take full effect until 2006. The purpose here is to lock in most of his upper-income tax reductions before it becomes even more obvious that we can't afford them. To make his plan look slightly less tilted, Bush also calls for boosting the per-child tax credit to \$1,000 now rather than waiting until 2010.

Over the next 10 years, however, most of the cost of Bush's latest tax-reduction program stems from his proposed tax cuts on dividends and capital gains. Although many reporters and investment analysts initially expressed confusion about this scheme, the details are spelled out pretty clearly in a 1992 report written by R. Glenn Hubbard, head of Bush's Council of Economic Advisers, back when he worked in George Bush Senior's Department of the Treasury.

Bush claims his new plan will end the so-called double taxation of corporate profits. But even the administration's chief booster for the dividend tax break, Hubbard, seems to understand that Bush is committing rhetorical fraud. In his 1992

Treasury report, Hubbard admitted that a large share of profits—most, these days—aren't taxed at all due to "tax preferences," but he recommended that we should ignore that bothersome fact except in the most egregious cases.

Following this twisted logic, Bush's plan would generally make dividends tax free. There is one caveat, however. Under what might be called the "CSX Exception" (after the notorious tax-avoiding company previously run by Treasury secretary nominee John Snow), a corporation that pays nothing in taxes would *not* be able to pay its shareholders tax-free dividends. To be precise, dividends would be tax exempt only if they didn't exceed a company's taxable income less dividends paid. Given today's high level

of corporate tax avoidance, this rule actually seems to have some teeth. Even so, a company that sheltered two-thirds of its earnings could still pay out one-fifth of its profits in tax-free dividends (more than most companies pay out now) despite the fact that not a penny of those profits was double taxed.

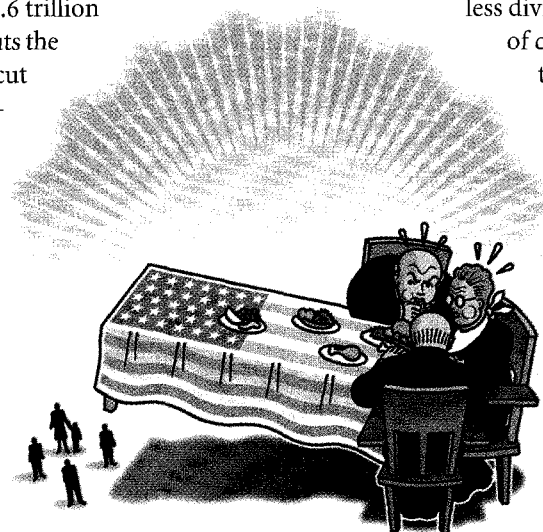
Moving in the opposite direction, there's also the "Microsoft Codicil," designed to appeal to high-tech companies that often don't pay dividends. Under this frighteningly complicated provision, shareholders of a company that

pays less than the maximum amount in tax-exempt dividends could be "deemed" to have received a tax-free dividend and reinvested it right back in the company's stock. That lets the shareholders pretend to have paid more than they really did for their stock and thus pay a lower capital-gains tax when they sell it. Within a decade, almost half of the cost of Bush's so-called dividend exemption is likely to reflect lower capital-gains taxes.

Not surprisingly, the benefits of Bush's dividends-and-capital-gains tax cut are extremely tilted toward those who own the most stock—that is, the wealthiest people. Half of the tax breaks would go to the best-off 1 percent of the taxpayers, and four-fifths would go to the best-off 10 percent.

Bush's zeal to cut taxes for the wealthy seems to know no bounds. If once again that turns out to be a terrible economic strategy, he's apparently willing to bear the political consequences. ♦

ROBERT S. MCINTYRE is the director of Citizens for Tax Justice.



Let's Get Ready to Rumble!

Al Sharpton gears up to take on the Dems.

BY GARANCE FRANKE-RUTA

THE HOUSE OF JUSTICE ON MADISON AVENUE BETWEEN 124th and 125th streets in New York City may not look like the epicenter of a movement that could wreak havoc within the Democratic Party. The unremarkable, somewhat dilapidated edifice sits on a block bookended by a restaurant and the A & M Deli, where you can find grown men buying 40-ounce bottles of malt liquor at 9:30 on a Saturday morning. Just outside the building, a street vendor displays stacks of Afrocentric self-help books and the sort of Marxist African histories routinely sold on Manhattan street corners and taught in City University of New York (CUNY) schools. Three volumes add visual punch to the piles and testify to the city's ongoing politics of racial resentment: Michael Bradley's *The Iceman Inheritance: Prehistoric Sources of Western Man's Racism, Sexism, and Aggression*; *Do You Dare Read—Why the Whiteman Is the Devil!* by Muhammad Shabazz and Ali Shaheed; and Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men*.

Yet within the House of Justice, as the headquarters of the civil-rights organization the National Action Network is called, the Rev. Al Sharpton, 48, is getting ready to do something remarkably mainstream for a full-time protest leader: run for president. A poster in the ground-level window—"Rev. Al Sharpton For President in 2004"—declares it. Head up a flight of well-worn stairs to the second floor of the House—just follow the hand-lettered sign duct-taped to the wall—and you can find Sharpton himself, dressed in a three-piece suit, holding forth on Saturday mornings at his weekly rally, an hour-long sermon-cum-lecture that is broadcast live on black-owned radio station WLIB-AM and in edited form several weeks later on public-access television.

The subject this weekend in late December: how the current retrenchment on civil-rights issues is leading to the end of America's second Reconstruction, which, says Sharpton, ran from 1965 to 1988, when it reached its pinnacle with the Rev. Jesse Jackson's second run for the presidency. But although Sharpton mentions deposed Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and newly installed Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.)—who Sharpton says has agreed to a sit-down talk on race relations—the reverend is oddly silent on the subject of President George W. Bush. Instead, he saves most of his con-

siderable ire for the Democratic Party and his *bête blanche*, the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC).

"They don't call themselves the Dixiecrats now, they call themselves the DLC, the Democratic Leadership Council," he thunders to his largely gray-haired audience of about 100. "Our fathers had to fight Jim Crow. We got to fight his son, James Crow, Esq. Speaks a little better, dresses a little nicer, got a little more education. But it's the same agenda. We're not looking for better slave masters—we're looking for freedom!" The audience members nod their heads in agreement and murmur assent. The accusation that the DLC is the second coming of the Dixiecrats was widely made by Jackson beginning in 1985, but in the immediate wake of the Lott scandal, calling someone a Dixiecrat has acquired new weight, resonance—and power.

Power is what Sharpton is after, and he's not afraid to admit it. He wants a seat at the national Democratic Party table. He wants to sit among the decision makers, allocating funds, plotting policy, bringing along a contingent of his own. It's one of the reasons he abandoned the jogging suits and gold medals he wore for so many years. It's why he breakfasts regularly at the posh Regency Hotel in Manhattan, where he can hobnob with the rich and powerful and have chance encounters with other presidential contenders, such as Sens. John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). And it's why he hopscoches the globe and keeps shots of himself with such internationally known figures as Cuban President Fidel Castro and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell on prominent display in his office.

Ever attentive to symbolism, Sharpton decided to file papers with the Federal Election Commission announcing his presidential exploratory committee on Jan. 21, the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He won't formally declare his candidacy until sometime later this year. But for more than a year now he has crisscrossed America, giving stump speeches at churches and universities (two of his expected bases of support) and getting the lay of the land in visits to Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina (the first three states to hold presidential primaries and caucuses). Sharpton's platform, still incomplete, is a traditionally left-liberal one of the sort that's rarely seen on the national stage these days but commonly espoused within the confines of New York City. He's adopted a modified version of unsuccessful 2002 New York Democratic

GARANCE FRANKE-RUTA is an associate editor at the Prospect.

gubernatorial candidate H. Carl McCall's reinvestment platform, calling for \$250 billion in federal and pension funds to be poured into roads, bridges, schools and other infrastructure projects. He's strongly opposed to the death penalty, racial profiling, war in Iraq and any kind of unilateral U.S. intervention abroad. He's pro-choice, pro-welfare and pro-affirmative action, and he also supports gay rights.

October saw the publication of Sharpton's second book, *Al on America* (co-written with Karen Hunter), in which he declared, "I am running for president to finally put the issues concerning most Americans onto the front burner." But, he wrote, "More than a matter of policy, this run for the president is a matter of identity." It's a tough formula to follow: Sharpton is trying to combine populism with an identity politics that has often proven divisive.

"You gotta remember something," Sharpton leans back and

SELECTIVE MEMORY

There's a bigger problem with Sharpton's history lesson than just his effort to set himself up as the next Jesse Jackson, however. And that problem is Sharpton's distortion of the facts. The DLC was formed in 1985, after Jackson's first run, when he won 3.5 million votes. But rather than being a response to Jackson, the DLC was formed as an answer to the liberal Mondale's catastrophic 1984 general election blowout, in which he lost 49 states. For its part, the National Rainbow Coalition took root between late 1984 and 1986, an outgrowth of Jackson's first campaign. It was only after spending the four years between elections courting labor and building this genuine multi-racial, progressive coalition that Jackson was able to run strong in the 1988 primary, garner up to 25 percent of the white vote in some states and become a major power broker within the Democratic Party. For his part, Brown, Jackson's manager at the



The power of the pulpit: Though castigated for his divisiveness, there's no doubt the Rev. Al Sharpton is a fine orator and debater.

tells me, when I interview him after the radio address about why he's planning to run for president. "The DLC was formed after the '88 campaign. They were formed as a direct result of the growing influence of Jackson and the [National] Rainbow Coalition. ... They were formed to bring—in their words—the party of Jackson, the Democratic Party, to the center. ... They were formed to destroy the influence of the Rainbow Coalition and Jesse Jackson. ... I see us as the children of the rainbow coming back to bring the party back to where it was. Now, remember now, when it was fought, when it happened, Jackson had gotten 7 million votes, more than any [Democratic] runner-up in history. Jackson got more votes in '88, coming in two, than [then-Minnesota Gov. Walter] Mondale got in 1984, winning the [primary] process, winning the nomination—and [future Democratic National Committee (DNC) Chairman] Ron Brown was the chair of the party. ... They were formed against Brown and Jackson, so that's why my perception is what it is."

1988 convention and later a commerce secretary under Bill Clinton, didn't become chairman of the DNC until 1989.

Sharpton's characterization of the battle between the DLC and the liberal wing of the Democratic Party as a war of southerners against black voters and Jackson is a convenient misreading of history. It also gives Sharpton an outsized role in the ongoing battle of left versus right that defines the modern Democratic Party. In New York, however, Sharpton's wars haven't been against the DLC; they've been against some of the most left-wing liberals running anywhere. And his attacks have helped make Democrats—in a city where their voters outnumber Republicans 5-to-1—the losers in race after race.

"DIVIDED—AND CONQUERED," DECLARED A *DAILY NEWS* editorial the day after the 1997 New York City mayoral primary. Al Sharpton had just won 32 percent of the Democratic vote citywide, coming in second in a three-way race

against Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, who had received slightly less than the 40 percent of votes required to avoid a runoff. Voter turnout for the primary was a historic low—a scant 18 percent of registered Democrats cast ballots—thanks to strong support for incumbent Mayor Rudy Giuliani and public apathy about both Messinger, a self-described progressive, and Sharpton. For the next week, a runoff seemed possible, and Messinger did what she thought she had to do—announce that she’d endorse Sharpton as the Democratic candidate for mayor in the unlikely event that he won the runoff—to ensure Sharpton’s support against Giuliani. Her decision alienated many white voters.

Sharpton held his fire for about a week while the absentee ballots were counted. But as soon as it became clear that there would be no runoff, he charged the New York City Board of Elections with voter fraud and sued for redress, saying it would be “a betrayal of history” not to contest the outcome. In the meantime, he refused to endorse Messinger at first and brought in Jackson to criticize city Democrats who wouldn’t endorse him because of his ties to Nation of Islam President Louis Farrakhan and anti-Semitic CUNY professor Leonard Jeffries. When Democratic leaders began to grumble, Sharpton told the *New York Post*, “No one can call in any chits on me.” Sharpton kept his name in the news and kept agitating until Messinger’s chances of winning the general election slid from slim to none. She ended up looking weak, cowed and hamstrung—and no match for the tough-guy Giuliani.

doning the bid only after running up against New York’s cumbersome ballot-access process, which ultimately invalidated all Freedom Party candidates that year.

THE SPOILER

Sharpton’s most destructive political performance may have come in 2001, when his actions helped throw the New York City mayoral contest to Republican neophyte Michael Bloomberg, a successful businessman who spent \$70 million of his own money on the race. Sharpton backed Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer in the primary contest against—once again—Mark Green, by then the city’s public advocate. Ferrer won the first primary but without enough of the vote to avoid a runoff. He then failed to respond adequately to the September 11 attack on Manhattan and lost the runoff to Green. Sharpton refused to endorse Green because, the reverend charged, the public advocate had run a racially offensive campaign by suggesting that Sharpton would be a puppeteer in a Ferrer administration. Democratic Party leaders, including Clinton, says Sharpton, were dispatched to heal the rift, but their efforts proved futile. Green decided he’d risk alienating Sharpton’s voters in order to preserve his standing with his own base; besides, Ferrer had already endorsed him. But the bitterness lingered, and on the day of the general election, thousands of Ferrer’s Latino primary voters stayed home while white voters bolted for the Republican, anyway. Green lost the election; days later, Sharpton was warmly greeted by a grateful Bloomberg.

In the Rev. Al Sharpton’s second book, *Al on America*, he writes, “More than a matter of policy, this run for the president is a matter of identity.”

The performance was vintage Sharpton. Each time Sharpton has lost, he has been one very sore loser. In his first race, the four-way 1992 U.S. Senate primary contest, he refused to endorse the winning Democratic candidate, liberal State Attorney General Robert Abrams (who was appointed by then-Gov. Mario Cuomo), in the general election against the incumbent pro-death penalty, pro-life Republican Al D’Amato. Granted, Abrams and Sharpton had a history of poor relations: Abrams had been the special prosecutor in the Tawana Brawley case and later went on to charge Sharpton on 67 counts of tax evasion, grand larceny and fraud. (Sharpton was later convicted, in yet another case, on one count of tax evasion and paid a \$5,000 fine.) But Sharpton also went out of his way to cause trouble for Abrams, suggesting that black voters might find it in their interest to stay home on the day of the general election. Abrams narrowly lost the race to D’Amato. Liberal New Yorkers suspected payback, and recalled that Sharpton had previously endorsed D’Amato in 1986 over Democratic contender and consumer activist Mark Green. (Today Sharpton calls the D’Amato endorsement “a mistake.”)

In the two-candidate 1994 U.S. Senate primary, Sharpton charged his opponent, Democratic incumbent Daniel Patrick Moynihan, with making racially insensitive comments, lampooned Moynihan’s patrician accent and refused to endorse Moynihan after the incumbent won with 74 percent of the vote. Instead, Sharpton tried to cut into Moynihan’s support by campaigning as an independent on the Freedom Party ticket, aban-

“I played along when I felt that we were not going to be disrespected,” says Sharpton of the Ferrer-Green controversy and his previous endorsements. “There’s a difference between cooperation and insanity.”

“His strength comes mainly not in guaranteeing that people can win but in guaranteeing they won’t win if he doesn’t support them,” says Fred Siegel, a fellow at the DLC’s Public Policy Institute. “I happen to not be a liberal, but I supported Mark Green because I think he’s better than the current guy. What I watched Sharpton do is make it impossible for him to win.”

“I LAUGH WHEN PEOPLE MENTION TO ME STUFF LIKE Brawley,” says Sharpton, referring to the controversial 1987 case in which he advocated for the 15-year old girl who claimed to have been held hostage in the woods and raped by six white men, including police officers. (A grand jury later determined that her story was a “hoax” concocted to avoid the wrath of a stepfather who had been convicted of murder.) “I ran for U.S. Senate right after Brawley—in ’92 Brawley had just happened—and they think Brawley will be more 15 years later in Iowa than it was in Wappingers Falls [N.Y.] three years after it happened? I don’t think so.”

Rather than becoming ancient history, though, the drama that the Brawley case started in 1987 has dragged on for years, at least in New York. In 1998, Sharpton was convicted of having slandered Stephen Pagones by accusing the former Dutchess County

assistant district attorney of having raped Brawley. Sharpton was eventually fined \$65,000, a sum he paid, he says, with the assistance of his longtime supporters, including attorney Johnnie Cochran, Harlem power broker and Inner City Broadcasting magnate Percy Sutton, and *Black Enterprise* and *Essence* magazine publishers Earl Graves and Edward Lewis. To this day, Sharpton maintains that he believes Brawley and that his actions were those of a good-hearted man simply coming to the defense of a troubled girl and innocently repeating her claims. But at the time he was far less conciliatory. "We are saying Steven Pagones did it," said Sharpton in 1988. "Now if Steven Pagones didn't do it, why isn't he suing us?"

Sharpton's boast about how little he was hurt by the Brawley affair obscures a central fact of his political history that will affect how he performs in Iowa, New Hampshire and plenty of states around the country: Sharpton has had tremendous difficulty drawing white voters, even in liberal New York. In the 1992 U.S. Senate primary, with the Brawley affair fresh in voters' minds, Sharpton won only 2 percent of the white vote, according to a *New York Times* post-election analysis. By contrast, Jackson earned 16 percent of the white vote in New York during the 1988 Democratic presidential primary, and 6 percent in 1984, according to a *New York Times*/CBS News Poll.

Sharpton and his allies contend that his draw among white voters has been better within the New York City limits, such as during his 1997 primary run for the mayoral nomination. "If you look at the '97 race, he didn't do all that bad in the white community," says Bill Lynch, a Democratic National Committee vice chairman. Lynch, who helped elect New York City's first black mayor, David Dinkins, in 1989, has signed on as an adviser for Sharpton's presidential bid, giving the reverend mainstream bona fides and a powerful connection to organized labor.

But neither Sharpton nor his advisers were able to provide substantiation for such voting-trend claims—in part because no exit polls were conducted for the 1997 mayoral primary or for the 1994 U.S. Senate primary, according to researchers at the Quinnipiac University Polling Institute and Voter Contact Services in New York. Sharpton actually got fewer votes in New York City during his 1997 mayoral campaign than he did during his 1992 U.S. Senate primary race—131,848 versus 136,118, according to a 2001 report by Jim Chapin of United Press International. Sharpton's numbers in both races showed a similar distribution across the city, suggesting a rock-solid core of support that did not grow in the mid-1990s but whose

significance increased as the size of the Democratic electorate shrank. Indeed, 48,000 fewer whites in New York City voted in the 1997 mayoral primary than did in the 1994 U.S. Senate race, making any improvement in Sharpton's appeal to white voters highly improbable. "It was the vote he had gotten almost anytime he had run for anything," says Messinger today. "He was never likely to get much less than that nor much more."

A recent poll among Democratic city voters found that Sharpton remains extremely polarizing racially, with a 65 percent unfavorable rating among whites and a mirror-image 65 percent favorable rating among African Americans. Citywide, according to a Quinnipiac University poll, 21 percent of people viewed him favorably in 2001, up from 9 percent the last year he ran for office,

in 1997—the ultra-low turnout election in which he nonetheless managed to win one-third of voters, or 6 percent of registered Democrats. In 2002 polls of likely future Democratic presidential primary voters, Sharpton registered between 1 percent and 7 percent support, depending on the state in question.

Advocacy on behalf of high-profile victims of police violence, such as Amadou Diallo and Patrick Dorismond, has helped Sharpton solidify his support among the New York City's blacks during the second Giuliani administration. This growing popularity allows Sharpton to pooh-pooh the importance of appealing to a broader array of voters in his presidential bid. "People romanticize Jackson's vote," Sharpton said. "Jackson only got 7 percent of the white vote in 1984, and 14 percent in '88."

In Sharpton's eyes, the fact that he's controversial is not a result of his own behavior but rather a symptom of the continuing racial divide in America. If

he alienates whites, it only confirms his premise that America is a racist country where whites are a hostile, ill-willed population that can't be trusted.

GOING NATIONAL

Though Sharpton is often castigated for his divisiveness, even his most vociferous critics concede his abilities as a speaker, calling him a masterful orator and an exceptional debater who will force people to take him seriously by virtue of his rhetorical skills. "I think he'll surprise people when he gets on the debate trail," says one Washington-based progressive Democratic Party activist. "He's very smart and very funny. He's not as brilliant as Jackson and not as well-versed on the issues, but he does have Jackson's ability to do poetry rather than prose.



The teacher and the preacher: James Brown (left) and Sharpton

Compared to established candidates who are parsing every word, he'll look very refreshing. ... He sees the opportunity to be the candidate on the left, and to be an interesting candidate in a field that has many cautious people doing very little."

Top aides to several of the other presidential candidates don't seem to be taking Sharpton seriously yet. "I mean, he has to get on the ballot," said one. Others seemed to know nothing about the reverend's history of winning 67 percent or more of the black vote during his runs for office in New York.

But beyond Sharpton's liberal politics and preacher's way with words are two personal qualities likely to have a powerful impact on the race ahead: He is notoriously sloppy with his facts and he consistently construes political differences people have with him as personal attacks. More than anything else, it is these qualities that have kept Sharpton from achieving Jackson's stature, and that may make his current bid for the presidency so potentially disastrous for the Democrats.

"He makes liberals enormously uneasy," notes the progressive Democratic activist. "If Al were by some miracle to become the second Jesse Jackson and build alliances against lines of race, and manage to do his homework as well, it would be very valuable. But you have to put up with a lot of indignities, which he wouldn't put up with, and it's a lot of hard work to do that."

In *Al on America*, Sharpton makes it very clear that if there is one thing he is unwilling to tolerate, it is anything that smacks of insult or a lack of personal respect. He cites James Brown, the "Godfather of Soul," for teaching him this lesson. When Sharpton was just 17, in 1971, he went on the road with Brown. It's there that the reverend met his wife, Kathy Jordan Sharpton, a statuesque back-up singer for Brown who still maintains a singing career and close connections with such disco divas as Stephanie Mills. It was the heyday of Brown's black-power funk phase, when his song "Say it Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" ruled the airwaves. Sharpton relates how Brown once walked off the set of *The Tonight Show*—forgoing 40 million viewers—because host Johnny Carson called Brown "Jimmy" instead of "Mr. Brown." And Brown refused to perform at Ronald Reagan's inauguration—not because he hated his politics but because he felt "they disrespected him," writes Sharpton. "That's one of the best lessons I learned from James Brown—never compromise your dignity for any amount of success, any amount of fame, any amount of money. Your dignity and self-respect is more important than any of those things."

Sharpton's politics are still rooted in a cultural black-nationalist philosophy. The Sharpton rally I attended in December began with group renditions of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," the spiritual written by black poet and novelist James Weldon Johnson in 1900 for the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birthday, and which later became known as the "Black National Anthem." At the first strains of the song, all the audience members rose to their feet and raised their right hands in a black-power salute, which they maintained until the song died away. In the corner of the room, a black-power fist carved out of wood sat next to a television. Sharpton still objects to white-owned businesses, such as the Swedish clothing giant H&M, coming into Harlem, and in 1995 called one small-business man a "white interloper" during a series of furious radio broadcasts. Sharpton's followers held regular protests at the store, and a man Sharpton now says he knew was unstable later set fire to the shop, killing eight.

SHARPTON'S COMBINATION OF BLACK-POWER POLITICS and personal sensitivity to insult means he rarely distinguishes between a personal attack, a legitimate political criticism of his politics and a racist insult to all black people. Already he has shown that he's planning to play the race card as a way of rebuffing normal questioning during the 2004 campaign.

"To even question why I'm running is insulting," he writes in *Al on America*. "Pundits ask me why not run for Congress or a local office, an office they say I might have a better chance of winning. That question, too, is insulting. If I'm good enough for Congress, why aren't I good enough for the highest office? It shows me the question is more about assigning me to a place rather than whether or not I represent a segment of this nation and am worthy of leading. What they're really saying is, 'Why don't you stay in your place?' Why didn't Jackie Robinson stay in the Negro League? Why doesn't Tiger Woods only play in Harlem?"

Sharpton warns that those who want to bring up his history of scandals and legal troubles should be ready to get hit in return. "That makes me want to run even more, so they can compare what they consider my baggage to the trunks some of the leaders of the Democratic Party are carrying," he writes.

All of which is likely to make for a very divisive time in the months ahead. A strong showing by Sharpton in even a few primaries—thanks to low voter turnout, for example—could lead to nightmarish complications for the eventual Democratic nominee. DLC Democrats will no doubt demand that the nominee repudiate Sharpton, but the reverend will play any such move as an attack on the party's absolutely essential core of black voters. Allying with Sharpton could alienate white moderates and swing voters, but failing to seek his support will likely lead to a major blowup with Sharpton that could ultimately drive down black support and lead to lingering intraparty divisions. Republicans, meanwhile, will fan the flames and love it. "Privately, in his mind, he's perfectly capable of distinguishing between a racial attack and a political attack," notes one liberal political analyst in New York. "His public MO is not only not to make that distinction but to intentionally blur that distinction. That's where his power comes from."

"He's going to hurt everyone," worries one well-known New York Democratic politician. "He can have a principled reason for trying to hurt conservative candidates, but remember the history—where he goes after liberal candidates also because he can out-liberal them and out-black them."

All of this is may come to a head as early as the South Carolina primary on Feb. 3, 2004. With half a dozen Democratic candidates seeking support in a state where 40 percent of the primary voters are black, no one will want to damage to his own candidacy by taking on Sharpton. But giving Sharpton a free pass will ultimately hurt the Democratic Party in the 2004 general election—and for years to come.

Already the dance is starting. "From a DNC perspective, we support any candidate that the Democratic voters support," says DNC spokesman Guillermo Meneses. That means Al Sharpton, too. And Sharpton knows it. It's why he's running, after all. As he writes in his book, "Even if I lose, I have the option to negotiate points with the Democratic Party." ♦

Where Are the Hawks on North Korea?

Faced with a real crisis, Bush does nothing.

BY IVO H. DAALDER AND JAMES M. LINDSAY

DOES GEORGE W. BUSH ACTUALLY BELIEVE HIS own foreign-policy pronouncements? A year ago he made North Korea a charter member of the “axis of evil” and vowed not to “permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons.” The National Security Strategy he issued last September warned that the United States would strike preemptively to make good on that pledge. Bush told Bob Woodward that he “loathed” Kim Jong Il, North Korea’s “dear leader.” On Jan. 3, Bush added that he had “no heart for somebody who starves his folks.”

All this tough talk would make you think Bush would be putting Pyongyang in his gun sights after it decided last month to restart its production of plutonium. But he isn’t. Instead, he and his advisers are counseling patience, dismissing preemption and trumpeting the virtues of working with North Korea’s neighbors. “Don’t be quite so breathless,” Colin Powell said, dismissing an interviewer who wondered why the administration did no more than express “disappointment” at Pyongyang’s decision to violate three major international agreements. “This is not a military showdown,” Bush said, “this is a diplomatic showdown.”

Even more surprising than the yawning gap between the administration’s rhetoric and its non-deeds is the stunning reversal of the punditocracy’s self-described hawks. Usually quick to bang the drums of war, many now argue for giving peace a chance. Charles Krauthammer applauds the White House for playing down the North Korean threat. “For now, there is little the administration can do,” he writes. “No point, therefore, in advertising our helplessness.” William Safire asserts that it’s China’s responsibility, not ours, to keep North Korea from going nuclear. For good measure, he proposes withdrawing the 37,000 American troops that have kept the peace on the Korean peninsula for half a century. And *The Wall Street Journal*’s Karen Elliott House laments, “There are no good options left for dealing with a nuclear North Korea.”

This counsel of despair rings hollow, however, when compared with what these same pundits (and many Republican officials) urged during the last North Korean nuclear crisis eight

years ago. Then, as now, Pyongyang was close to reprocessing spent nuclear fuel into plutonium. It was also working feverishly to complete construction of two larger reactors that could produce enough nuclear material to build tens of weapons a year. But unlike his successor, President Clinton actively sought to halt these nuclear efforts. He succeeded. Pyongyang agreed to freeze its plutonium-production program in return for shipments of fuel oil and help in building proliferation-resistant nuclear reactors.

Hawks denounced the 1994 Agreed Framework as appeasement. They wanted war and disparaged diplomacy. “Peace in Our Time” was how one of Krauthammer’s many columns at the time was headlined. Safire suggested that Clinton “be prepared to crush a vaunted million-man army in Asia.” House wrote, “America faces a clear choice between confrontation and capitulation,” and recommended that Washington reject Clinton’s embrace of appeasement and strike first instead.

WHAT EXPLAINS THE HAWKS’ PUGNACITY THEN AND timidity now? They say it’s because North Korea now has nuclear weapons. “We hawks,” House writes, “believe it or not, understand the difference between using military force to preclude a future nuclear conflict and initiating military action that might spark one.” So war is not an option. North Korea with its one or possibly two nuclear weapons has deterred the United States. Whether Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal stabilizes or grows larger makes no difference to them. “Yes, they have had these couple of nuclear weapons for many years,” Powell said, “and if they have a few more, they have a few more, and they could have them for many years.”

Krauthammer goes even further. “But even if nukes were not a consideration, we would be deterred by North Korea’s conventional military capacity,” he wrote, which could destroy Seoul before America could destroy the regime in Pyongyang. “North Korea may already have passed the threshold to invulnerability from American attack,” Krauthammer added. This from the man who otherwise trumpets “the unipolar era” of unprecedented American dominance—a Thucydidean world in which the strong does as it wishes and the weak suffer as they must.

But these arguments don’t hold up. The North Korean nuclear threat was exactly the same eight years ago as it is today. North Korea was then believed to have extracted 12 or 13 kilo-

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grams of plutonium, enough to make one or two nuclear weapons. In late 1993, the U.S. intelligence community concluded that there was a “better than even chance” that Pyongyang had done just that—a conclusion widely reported at the time.

In the mid-1990s, a new analysis of the available data actually concluded that North Korea had reprocessed less plutonium (only 8 or 10 kilograms) than originally believed. Last summer, the intelligence community determined that North Korea had begun an illicit uranium-enrichment program in 2000—a fact that North Korean officials acknowledged in October. But these programs involve a different and more complicated technology. They will not produce sufficient weapons-grade material to construct a nuclear bomb until 2005 at the earliest.

As for Krauthammer’s argument that North Korea’s conventional capability is too daunting, the military balance of forces

But focusing on the hawks’ hypocrisy misses the real danger in their policy reversal. They are now encouraging a White House that will neither negotiate with Pyongyang nor compel it to change course. The most likely consequence of this strategy is the acceleration of North Korea’s nuclear program rather than its end—something that bipartisan policy has sought for decades to avoid. The administration’s do-nothing policy is foolish and dangerous, and quite unnecessary.

Whether North Korea today possesses even a single nuclear weapon can be debated. The intelligence community based its conclusion that one or two bombs exist not on hard evidence but on the assumption that if Pyongyang could produce a minimal amount of fissile material, it could build a bomb. The White House itself agrees that Pyongyang currently possesses no more than two nuclear weapons. Preventing North Korea from acquiring more weapons is therefore essential. Although

Powell dismisses the threat of additional weapons—“What are they going to do with another two or three nuclear weapons when they’re starving, when they have no energy, when they have no economy that’s functioning?” he asks—the threat is clear. A North Korea that has eight or 10 weapons, let alone dozens, has a much greater chance of delivering one successfully. And a North Korea that has weapons to spare can sell some to the highest bidders, such as al-Qaeda. This is precisely what a starving, bankrupt country is likely to do—and it is precisely the nightmare that President Bush warned against in denouncing the axis of evil.

In these circumstances, a policy of capitulation will not do. But neither is it enough simply to seek to restore the 1994 Agreed Framework. Pyongyang’s admission that it violated that deal means that it must be

made to do more now. It must account for all its fissile material and spent fuel, and ship both out of the country. It must also shut down all its nuclear facilities and place them under international inspection. And inspectors must have the right to go anywhere, anytime, to ensure North Korea’s compliance.

The only way to get Pyongyang to end its nuclear aspirations is to offer it a choice between more carrots and bigger sticks. If North Korea agrees to these demands, the United States and its regional allies should be prepared to sign a peace treaty (including new security guarantees), establish full diplomatic relations and offer significant economic assistance—all tied to specific steps that North Korea must take to dismantle its nuclear program. As an extra incentive, Washington must make clear that if Pyongyang fails to put its nuclear facilities under international control within a preset time frame of one or two months, the United States will destroy its nuclear facilities—and the dear leader’s regime should he choose to retaliate.

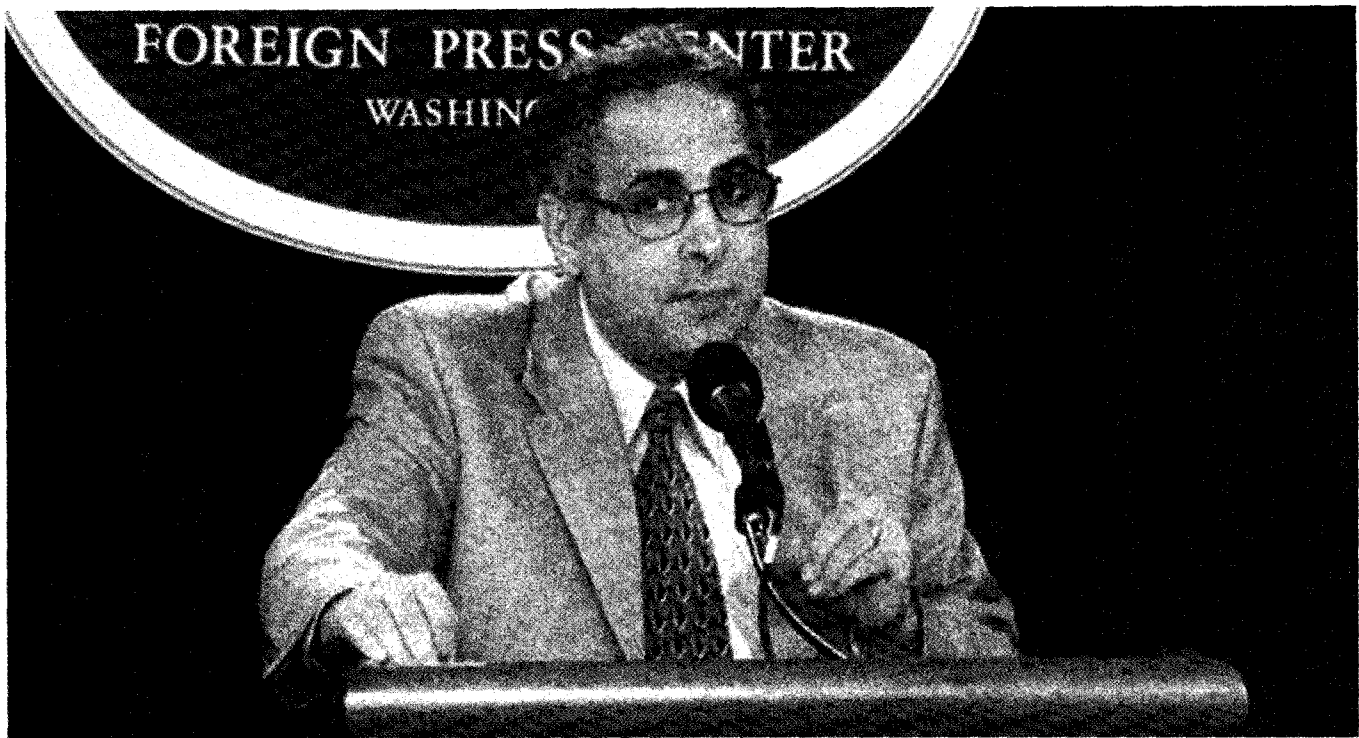
The Bush administration and its hawkish supporters have found their match in Kim Jong Il’s North Korea. Now—when the very threat they have long warned of is about to materialize—is not the time for the United States to blink. Now is the time for unity in action to confront this threat. ♦



Watchful waiting, or is it waitful watching? Colin Powell talks Korea.

has indeed changed—but in America’s favor. The hawks repeatedly cite America’s new might in calling for war with Iraq. Regime change there will be a cakewalk, they say, because U.S. forces are so much more capable than they were during the Gulf War. Yet the same increased capability holds true for the Korean peninsula as well, except that there the balance has shifted even more dramatically. Since 1994, North Korea has lost perhaps as many as 2 million people—10 percent of its population—in a catastrophic famine. The country’s entire gross domestic product totals less than 4 percent of the U.S. defense budget. A second Korean War would no doubt be costly, but the United States could win any such conflict quickly and decisively.

SO WHAT IS GOING ON? WHY THE WAR cries then and a willingness to capitulate to a nuclear North Korea now? The answer seems to lie in the one thing that *did* change since the last Korean nuclear crisis: the party holding the White House. In 1994, North Korea gave the hawks a convenient stick with which to beat Bill Clinton. The particulars of the military balance on the Korean peninsula and the feasibility of a war there were irrelevant. The target wasn’t the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, it was the Democratic Party.



Just one more point: John Zogby, pollster to the media and numerous interest groups

John Zogby's Creative Polls

And a closer look at his methods

BY CHRIS MOONEY

IN A RECENT *NEW YORK TIMES* MAGAZINE COVER STORY about animal rights, journalist Michael Pollan reported that 51 percent of Americans believe that “primates are entitled to the same rights as human children.” It was a surprising finding, but one that Pollan simply attributed to a “recent Zogby Poll.” When Pollan’s article came out, you can only imagine the celebration at the Doris Day Animal League, a group dedicated to establishing legal rights for chimpanzees. The league’s role in commissioning the survey went entirely unmentioned in the *Times* story. By hiring the renowned pollster John Zogby, the group had essentially purchased an objective fact, one that entered into the conventional wisdom via the nation’s leading Sunday magazine.

Whomever you blame for this small propaganda coup, it’s hardly unique. Media coverage of polling results often neglects to mention the self-interestedness of the sponsor, and John Zogby is a leading enabler. Today, Zogby International’s polling reputation may be second only to that of the hallowed Gallup Organization, which makes having a Zogby Poll extremely desirable for advocacy groups across the political spectrum. Animal rights is a lefty cause, but one recent Zogby Poll conducted for the libertarian Cato Institute found that “two-thirds of likely vot-

ers support personal Social Security accounts”—i.e., partial privatization. Another, conducted in 1997 for the anti-tort group New Yorkers for Civil Justice Reform, found that Empire State citizens “overwhelmingly believe that the cost of lawsuit awards is too high.” And a Newsmax.com/Zogby International Poll, conducted for the right-wing Newsmax Web site, found in late 1999 that two-thirds of Americans wanted Congress to consider a *second* impeachment proceeding against then-President Clinton. It helped that the poll primed respondents with speculative allegations that the president traded nuclear technology to the Chinese in exchange for campaign cash.

What these polls have in common is that they reveal “findings” that their sponsors wish the public to believe as facts. And Zogby’s standing as a reputable pollster buys instant credibility.

There’s nothing new about dubious surveys: An infamous Roper Poll released in 1992 came to the wild conclusion that 3.7 million Americans had likely been abducted by aliens. And Zogby International isn’t the only firm available for advocacy groups, candidates and corporations in need of creatively framed findings and message testing. But among high-profile pollsters, Zogby is unusual in the extent to which he has blended partisan and interest-group polling with credibility-enhancing contracts for media outlets such as *Reuters*, NBC News, MSNBC, and numerous newspapers and television stations.

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As Zogby himself acknowledges, the reputé he derives from media polling helps him sell his services to more self-interested clients. The lucky groups end up with the Zogby brand name attached to findings that advance their agendas. "Media organizations should have people who absolutely aren't polling for interest groups," observes Robert Blendon, who directs Harvard University's Program on Public Opinion and Health and Social Policy. Blendon notes that most major media polling conglomerates, such as the ABC News/*Washington Post* Poll, maintain firewalls between their work and outside interests.

Frequent Zogby collaborator John K. White of The Catholic University of America believes the pollster does his best to divine what the public really thinks, but, as Zogby himself concedes, the ultimate decision on whether to make public a particular poll rests with his clients. By contrast, Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center for People and the Press notes that when he was president of the Gallup Organization, clients who sought surveys for public-relations purposes had to release the results no matter what they showed.

Gallup likewise doesn't work for political candidates. In the last election, however, John Zogby brazenly polled for a Democratic opponent to Rep. Tom DeLay (R-Texas), paying out of his own pocket because he wanted to provide a "fresh challenge" to the Republican House whip. Zogby also polled for New York's millionaire independent gubernatorial candidate Tom Golisano,

ists are, by default, the chief arbiters of quality. For years, Zogby has been regularly exalted as "the nation's most accurate pollster," in the words of FOX's Bill O'Reilly—a distinction Zogby owes to his pinpoint prediction of the 1996 presidential outcome. It doesn't hurt that Zogby is a bright and charming television personality in a polling profession that has its share of geeks.

Because Zogby works for both left and right, it's often assumed that he serves the causes of truth and objectivity. Unlike partisan pollsters, who are known for giving their own parties some padding in surveys, Zogby is generally invited on the air without anyone from the "other side" for balance. "I can't think of any pollster other than Zogby who regularly works for people on both sides and is touted by people on both sides," notes University of Virginia political analyst Larry Sabato. "That's quite an accomplishment. Whether it's good or bad is another question."

In the summer of 2001, journalist Cynthia Cooper alleged on *Women's eNews* that Zogby had conducted a poll for an "unidentified conservative client" that reached the questionable conclusion that a majority of Americans would support legislation requiring welfare recipients to use birth control in order to be eligible for benefits. Cooper also noted that Zogby's refusal to disclose the poll's sponsor violated the American Association for Public Opinion Research's (AAPOR) code of professional ethics and practices.

As John Zogby himself acknowledges, the reputé he derives from media polling helps him sell his services to more self-interested clients.

declaring in late October, "I'm ready to mortgage my house and predict that Golisano comes in at least second, barring anything unforeseen." Golisano came in third with 14 percent of the vote.

IN THE PAST HALF-DECADE, MEANWHILE, NUMEROUS Zogby Polls for various special interests have relied on creative phrasing to give the impression of wide public support for the view that the given client is promoting. In response to a question about the wording of the Newsmax.com impeachment survey, Zogby responded, "If we had anything to do with the wording of that question, then I guess I have a problem with it." He telephoned back to add that it was "probably not the best wording, but, I mean, I think it's defensible." Zogby acknowledges that he retains control over question phrasing. Indeed, in the world of interest-group polling, clients often submit proposed questions or concepts, but much of what they are buying is the polling firm's expertise in devising wording that produces results.

Zogby protests that he can't control the misuse of sound survey data by interest groups and incautious journalists. And, in fairness, Zogby is just one link in a chain of misinformation. Any criticism of him is also, inevitably, a criticism of major media organizations whose skeptical faculties, when it comes to polling, are suspended.

THE GULLIBLE MEDIA

Indeed, key to Zogby's success is a credulous media, particularly cable news. In the unregulated polling industry, journal-

Zogby confirms that he did the poll. But he adds, "There is nothing that forces me to reveal [a sponsor's identity]. If I'm issuing that as a Zogby Poll, you know, then I'm fine and willing to take the heat." Zogby also opines, "The credibility is in the numbers, not the sponsorship." In fact, an advice sheet to journalists from the National Council on Public Polls (NCPP) warns otherwise. "You must know who paid for the survey," it reads, "because that tells you—and your audience—who thought these topics are important enough to spend money finding out what people think. This is central to the whole issue of why the poll was done."

Yet Zogby is right about his freedom from regulation; he is not compelled to reveal his sponsors. Because industry self-regulation is weak, self-interested polling is often mislabeled, and the media seem not to care.

Look more closely at the Doris Day Animal League survey. *The New York Times Magazine* report that 51 percent of Americans think "primates are entitled to the same rights as human children" goes far beyond anything in the actual poll. First, the poll didn't ask about primates—a category including anything from pygmy mouse lemurs to gorillas—but about chimpanzees. Second, the actual question gave respondents four options to choose from: In brief, they could say that chimps ought to be treated "like property," "similar to children," "the same as adults" or "not sure." Given this particular set of choices, option two was the obvious pick—almost as if respondents were steered toward it. And after 51 percent had chosen "similar to chil-

dren,” the Zogby survey inexplicably translated “similar” into “the same” in its conclusions—a very big difference. The Doris Day Animal League then reported this in its press materials.

Organizations such as the NCPP and the AAPOR have guidelines and standards stressing openness, balanced questions, transparency and so forth. But as self-regulators, they’ve rarely censured individual pollsters. One of the exceptions is Republican pollster Frank Luntz, who was reprimanded by the AAPOR in 1997 because he “repeatedly refused to make public essential facts about his research on public attitudes about the Republicans’ ‘Contract with America.’” The AAPOR, however, has not taken on Zogby.

IT WASN’T ALWAYS CLEAR THAT JOHN ZOGBY WOULD END up a pollster: For a while he was a consumer activist in his hometown of Utica, N.Y., and at one point even ran for mayor. In the early 1980s, he was heavily involved, along with his brother James Zogby, in Arab-American political activism. But since the founding of his company in 1984, Zogby, a second generation Lebanese American, has become a dominant figure in the polling industry. Today no one doubts Zogby’s political insightfulness, and the fact that he still works from Utica allows him to inject a helpful outside perspective into the cliquish world of Beltway politics.

Yet Zogby is also very much the businessman, one who has seen his firm grow steadily over the past several years into an outfit with some 500 full- and part-time employees. Roughly two-thirds of the 300 to 500 polling projects conducted each year by Zogby International are corporate or private-sector work; business clients run the gamut, from Coca-Cola to Philip Morris to Microsoft. Such corporate contracts, of course, tend to be the most lucrative in the polling business.

To a significant extent, the entire edifice rests upon Zogby’s well-remembered success in the 1996 presidential race between Bill Clinton and Bob Dole. “All hail Zogby, the pollster who conquered the 1996 election,” wrote *Washington Post* pollster Richard Morin after the results came in. Zogby had forecast an 8.1 percent Clinton margin, and the actual margin was 8.4 percent. Most of Zogby’s media-polling contracts date from 1996 and afterward. It didn’t hurt that he was also quite accurate in the 2000 presidential contest. (Not that presidential races are necessarily the best way of judging pollster accuracy: By the end, most polls are within a few points of one another.)

Zogby does have his detractors among the polling fraternity. “The pollsters have a view of Zogby that doesn’t seem to be shared by the news organizations,” observes Warren Mitofsky, who sits on the polling review board of the NCPP. Zogby’s performance deteriorated somewhat in the 2002 elections (which he says prompted an internal audit). According to an NCPP postmortem, Zogby got five races wrong out of 17 polled on a nonpartisan basis. His final Colorado Senate poll, for instance, put Democratic challenger Tom Strickland ahead

of Republican incumbent Wayne Allard by a margin of 49 percent to 44 percent. (Allard actually won with 51 percent to Strickland’s 45 percent.) Following the election, Zogby put out a mea culpa comparing his firm to the New York Yankees, which despite failing to win the 2002 World Series was still “the best team in baseball.”

MOVING RIGHT

Zogby describes his personal political history as “very left Democrat.” His brother James, head of the Arab American Institute, was an adviser to Al Gore’s presidential campaign. Yet 1996 helped establish John Zogby as a favorite pollster with the political right. This crossover potential has allowed him to work for groups from the Club for Growth to the National Environmental Trust while still being labeled objective by the media.



Zogby became the right’s favorite pollster when he accurately predicted the 1996 election.

To see how Zogby earned his cachet with conservatives, consider the context of the 1996 elections. The year 1996 was a watershed one for polling because many mainstream media organizations, including the CBS News/*New York Times* Poll, significantly overstated Clinton’s lead, predicting a double-digit victory. Following the election, Everett Carl Ladd Jr., director of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, even wrote an influential article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (reprinted in *The Wall Street Journal*) titled, “The Election Polls: An American Waterloo.” Ladd called the polling “so flawed that the entire enterprise should be reviewed by a blue-ribbon panel of experts.” Though much overstated, Ladd’s scathing critique—especially its *Wall Street Journal* version—fed into a widespread sense of disillusionment with polling among political conservatives. Republicans, argued Ladd, view polls as tools of the liberal media and are less likely to respond to them, creating a pro-Democrat bias of precisely the sort that plagued the 1996 election.

Into this breach stepped Zogby. Throughout the 1996 election season, his polls had shown a far closer race than others’ had. Critics had expressed disbelief but he had been vindicated by the

final election result. Zogby claimed to remedy the perceived problem of Democratic bias by weighting his data according to a previously determined distribution of party affiliation: 34.5 percent Democrats, 34 percent Republicans. This somewhat subjective approach gives some academic public-opinion specialists serious heartburn. As the University of Michigan political scientist Michael Traugott explains, "There's no known distribution of party identification in the sense that we think of a known distribution of sex or race. All we know comes from other survey data, so it has to be an estimate by definition."

Even if all of Zogby's techniques couldn't be taught in a university course, that critique seemed irrelevant after he called the election correctly. By February 1998, Zogby had been asked by Rush Limbaugh to do a poll on the Monica Lewinsky scandal, one that, by emphasizing moral questions, would differ from surveys showing widespread support for the president in the face of Kenneth Starr's inquiries. Zogby obliged. The five-question poll opened with the following: "Suppose you are ready to hire a candidate who is well-qualified for the job, but then you find out that they like to have consensual sex with subordinates. Still hire them?"

Another question asked whether it was "immoral" for a U.S. president to have "consensual sex with a 21-yr-old intern." Sure enough, two-thirds of respondents did indeed consider it immoral. Of course, their only other option was that such behav-

Association (NRA). Zogby told the *Prospect* that O'Leary's role in the surveys wasn't always made apparent but, "Anyone who asked, to the best of my knowledge, was told." However, when columnist Arianna Huffington asked Zogby about the funder of an American Values Poll in April of 2000, according to her column, he responded, "I can't say who it is, but he publishes a newsletter in which he prints the poll's results." Presumably that newsletter would be the *O'Leary Report*.

The strongly Republican slant of the O'Leary-Zogby surveys is unmistakable. One released in October 2000 found that voters favored George W. Bush over Gore on "20 out of 25" campaign issues. Or, as the Zogby International/Associated Television News press release put it, "Bush Overwhelms Gore On Presidential Campaign's Major Public Policy Issues." That's a pretty convenient finding for a longtime Republican consultant just before a presidential election, which may be why Associated Television News was only identified in the release as an organization that "has covered domestic and international news for 20 years" while Zogby International was described as "a respected, non-partisan polling firm."

The poll contrasted purported candidate positions on different issues, and asked respondents to choose which they favored. Bush-Cheney always came first, Gore-Lieberman second. The poll used loaded language such as "partial-birth abortions" (a term coined by anti-abortionists) and tended to define the Gore-

Rush Limbaugh bestowed on Zogby the "my favorite pollster" mantle, a kind of calling card for use among political conservatives.

ior was "acceptable," something even Clinton's defenders probably didn't agree with.

The *Prospect's* reviewer of the Limbaugh poll, Cornell University communications professor Dietram Scheufele, notes, "It is possible that the answers to some of these questions were influenced by questions that were asked before, i.e., by question-order effects." In other words, the premise of the first question could influence responses to subsequent questions. Unless the questions were randomly rotated, this would skew later answers.

Rush Limbaugh bestowed on Zogby the "my favorite pollster" mantle, a kind of calling card for use among political conservatives. By October of 1998, Zogby had reiterated in *National Review* his findings about the public's opinion of the Lewinsky affair. That year Zogby also did some 60 polls for the Republican Congressional Committee. It's no wonder that many today still think he's a Republican pollster.

MORE PRECISELY, ZOGBY IS A POLLSTER WHO WORKS with a lot of Republicans, and in ways that are not always disclosed. Most journalists were probably unaware that some of Zogby's so-called American Values Polls were a joint venture with an organization called Associated Television News, which has a very strong Republican pedigree. Associated Television News is run by Bradley O'Leary, a longtime Republican consultant known for his legendary fundraising abilities and for doing direct mail for the National Rifle

Lieberman position in a politically unappealing way. Cornell's Scheufele also notes that the poll created "false dichotomies" by forcing respondents to answer complicated public-policy questions in a simplistic either-or format. For example:

Bush-Cheney say we need to test teachers and better train those who do not meet minimum standards. Students must meet minimum academic requirements before passing, and more funds should be allocated to help state programs. Gore-Lieberman say more teachers should be hired at higher wages, more classrooms should be built, and the federal government should take more control over our educational system to achieve a better balance between rich and poor school districts.

Unsurprisingly, with this framing, 53 percent approved the Bush-Cheney position to just 34 percent for the Gore-Lieberman position. Here's another: "Bush-Cheney say that tax refunds should be returned to those who were overtaxed. Gore-Lieberman say that tax refunds should be used to fund the federal government." Hanging the albatross of the "federal government" around Gore-Lieberman's neck—while painting Bush-Cheney as the champion of the "overtaxed"—sounds more like a Republican National Committee press release than a poll.

When the conservative *Washington Times* covered one of the polls, neither O'Leary's Republican efforts nor his NRA work was mentioned. On Zogby's Web site, meanwhile, a December 2000 American Values Poll with flattering results for the NRA also made no mention of O'Leary. Other American Values Poll

results invariably favored conservatives. When asked to explain the striking Republican slant to these surveys, Zogby said: "Call Karl Rove at the White House and ask what he thinks of me. He'll tell you that he hates my guts."

CATO CALLING

Among Zogby's more dubious findings have been his polls on Social Security for the libertarian Cato Institute. Academic research has shown that public opinion on Social Security reform varies greatly depending on the questions asked. If respondents are merely asked whether they think people should have the option of investing part of their Social Security income in private accounts, they approve by a margin of roughly 2-to-1. But the response changes dramatically if people are clearly warned that such privatization could have negative consequences, such as cuts in guaranteed benefits. "As soon as the public is given a sense of what the risks are that we entail to ourselves as individuals by partially privatizing Social Security, people then are against it," explains Fay Lomax Cook, director of the Institute for Policy Research at Northwestern University.

Zogby insists he asks "balanced questions" on Social Security, but consider his Cato polls. The latest, in the summer of 2002, began with this question: "There are some in government who advocate changing the Social Security system to give younger workers the choice to invest a portion of their Social Security taxes through individual accounts similar to IRAs or 401(k) plans. Would you [support or oppose]?"

Sure enough, without any mention of risk, 68.1 percent of the 1,109 likely voters sampled vouched their support. The same Cato poll even managed to use the Enron scandal to demonstrate support for privatization:

With which statement do you most agree? A: The Enron scandal shows the dangers of the stock market and why we must maintain Social Security as it is and not allow individuals to invest their payroll taxes in personal retirement accounts. B: The Enron scandal proves that people need more choice and more control over their retirement savings, including allowing workers the option to invest part of their Social Security taxes in a personal retirement account.

Here 63.3 percent chose option B, perhaps because A did such a poor job of framing the argument that business scandals *should* cause wariness about privatization. Who could object to "more choice and more control"?

Other pollsters have approached Social Security questions more carefully. A December 2002 *Los Angeles Times* Poll presented the complexities of Social Security privatization and found that 55 percent disapproved of "allowing younger workers to divert their payroll tax money from Social Security into private investment accounts." In the *Los Angeles Times* Poll, those who *approved* of partial privatization—just 38 percent—were subsequently asked a follow-up question: "Would you still support this proposal if it meant a reduction in the guaranteed benefits retirees receive through the Social Security system?" Thirty-nine percent of the sub-group then said they would be opposed.

Later questions in Zogby's poll made some slight allusion to privatization's risks but no mention of the possibility of a reduction in guaranteed benefits for retirees. Cato relentlessly

publicized the finding from the first Zogby question. "Two-Thirds of Likely Voters Support Personal Social Security Accounts," announced Cato's Web site, citing the "respected independent polling firm Zogby International." Zogby protests that he has no control over how his clients and the media cite his results, but he certainly appeared to lend his endorsement by attending Cato press conferences and other events to discuss his findings. United Press International headlined its story about the survey, "Poll says majority wants Soc. Sec. reform," which quoted Zogby on the alleged popularity of the Cato program. "Republicans should wake up and realize they have a winner," Zogby said.

Afterward, supporters of partial privatization had Zogby's poll to cite. In a December 2002 *Weekly Standard* article arguing that Social Security reform was still very much on President Bush's agenda, Fred Barnes referred to Zogby's Social Security polling as if it came from an objective source rather than a pollster employed by Cato. In a *National Review Online* article published in September 2002, meanwhile, Stephen Moore and Thomas L. Rhodes of the conservative Club for Growth—which, as previously mentioned, has also used Zogby's polling—cited the 68 percent figure. Moore and Rhodes did disclose Cato's role in the poll but didn't mention that Zogby's question omitted possible risks of privatization.

FINALLY, CONSIDER AN AUGUST 2001 ZOGBY POLL FOR the conservative Seattle-based Discovery Institute, which advances the theory of "Intelligent Design" (ID), a more subtle successor to Biblical creationism, as a rival to evolution in high-school science classes. The Zogby Poll asked:

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: 'When Darwin's theory of evolution is taught in schools, students should also be able to learn about scientific evidence that points to an intelligent design of life.'

An impressive 78 percent of respondents agreed with the statement; 53 percent of them strongly agreed. At first glance this might seem innocuous enough—who could oppose the teaching of *scientific* evidence? But how many respondents grasped that "intelligent design of life" is used as a synonym for divine creation? Also, as Eugenie C. Scott of the National Center for Science Education points out, the premise that scientific evidence supporting ID actually exists is a highly dubious one. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has specifically stated that ID is not science.

As with his polling for Cato, Zogby's Discovery Institute work has been widely cited by ID proponents. In part, Zogby is just testing messages for interest groups, which he reasonably calls a "legitimately defined methodology." But Zogby is also trading on his reputation as a legitimate, media-certified pollster to help groups disseminate inflated claims about public opinion based on inventive wording. In his defense, Zogby says he has refused to work for some clients, including ones who were pro-Confederate Flag and militantly anti-gay, and emphasizes that he ultimately controls question wording. "Apparently this doesn't pass your smell test," he says. "I'm telling you, it passes mine." ♦

Tilting on the Axis (of Evil)

Iran's puzzling relationship with the United States—and itself

BY NOY THRUPKAEW

I NEVER THOUGHT I'D HEAR "HOTEL CALIFORNIA" IN the bleak desert landscape of Iran. Don Henley's tale of a bad trip was a big hit with our guide, Reza, however, and he'd turn up the volume whenever the song looped around on his tape player. "This could be heaven or this could be hell," Don and Reza sang, as we drove in the mountains near Shiraz, several hundred miles south of the capital Tehran, passing crumbling caravansaries, those vacant hotels once used as inns by travelers on the Silk Road in the Middle East and Asia. "You see," Reza proclaimed, gesturing at his tapes of Western music as we sped past dry, barren mountains chalked with the names of imams, "everything you do in America we can do in Iran." We neared a police checkpoint—one of many where buses are searched for drugs—and Reza leaned over and snapped off the music. After we drove past, he turned it back on. "Livin' it up at the Hotel California!" he sang jubilantly. Only later did I understand why Reza interrupted the song every time checkpoints came in sight: Music from the United States is illegal.

Welcome to Iran, which, along with Iraq and North Korea, was cited as part of the "axis of evil" by President Bush in his State of the Union address last year. We're poised for war with Iraq. North Korea is creating almost daily headlines because of its nuclear-weapons program. But the relationship between the United States and Iran is increasingly enigmatic, reflecting, perhaps, the difficulty of dealing with a country whose oppressive regime calls the United States "the Great Satan" and whose people may well be the most pro-American in the region.

Run by a theocracy that the Bush administration has accused of acquiring weapons of mass destruction, opposing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and exporting terrorism, Iran seems to fall neatly on the side of those who are against us, at least in the calculus of President Bush's worldview. But there are other aspects of Iran that complicate a black-and-white verdict. In defiance of previous expectations, Iran's government has become increasingly willing to engage in backroom negotiations with the United States whenever the countries' interests are aligned. And, more importantly, Iran has a young pro-democracy population that is curious to explore relations with the United States. A grass-roots movement for reform is growing

out of the soil of the Islamic Republic, and it's one that could help transform the ultimate impediment to Iranian-U.S. rapprochement someday: the regime itself.

FOR SWORN ENEMIES, THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN found they had a good deal in common after September 11. They shared urgent strategic interests, including the neutralization of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the stabilization of the region. A Shi'a Muslim country, Iran never wanted the Pakistan-supported, radical Sunni Taliban as a neighbor in Afghanistan. Secretly aiding the U.S. campaign to remove the Taliban from power, Iran allowed the transport of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, supplied the Northern Alliance with intelligence and even persuaded ally Burhanuddin Rabbani to abandon his ambitions to lead Afghanistan in favor of the U.S.-backed Hamid Karzai.

The two countries' interests are again aligned with regard to Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who launched a 1980 attack against Iran that resulted in eight years of war and 800,000 Iranian casualties. When he wasn't showering Iran with bombs and chemical weapons, Hussein was harboring dissident Iranian groups that staged attacks on Tehran. Once again, the United States and Iran are engaging in covert talks to work out a mutually beneficial agreement—perhaps the use of Iranian airspace in the event that U.S. pilots are hit by Iraqi fire, or Iran's influence with Iraqi Shi'a opposition groups.

Although Iran's recent cooperation is a hopeful sign in a long history of bristling U.S.-Iran encounters, it's not enough to kick start the process toward long-term cordial relations. There's the matter of Bush's charges against Iran, which the administration continues to stand by even though some countries we are friendly with could easily be subjected to the same charges. (Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons, its past support for the Taliban and the rumors that it is harboring Osama bin Laden in the tribal areas along its borders are a case in point.)

Even more problematic is the history of U.S.-Iranian relations: the U.S.-backed coup in 1953 that reinstated Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to power, the Islamic revolution that removed the shah, the 1979 hostage crisis and the severing of diplomatic relations in 1980. That past, along with the hard-line, undemocratic stance of the more powerful branches of the Iranian bureaucracy, is keeping both the United States and the

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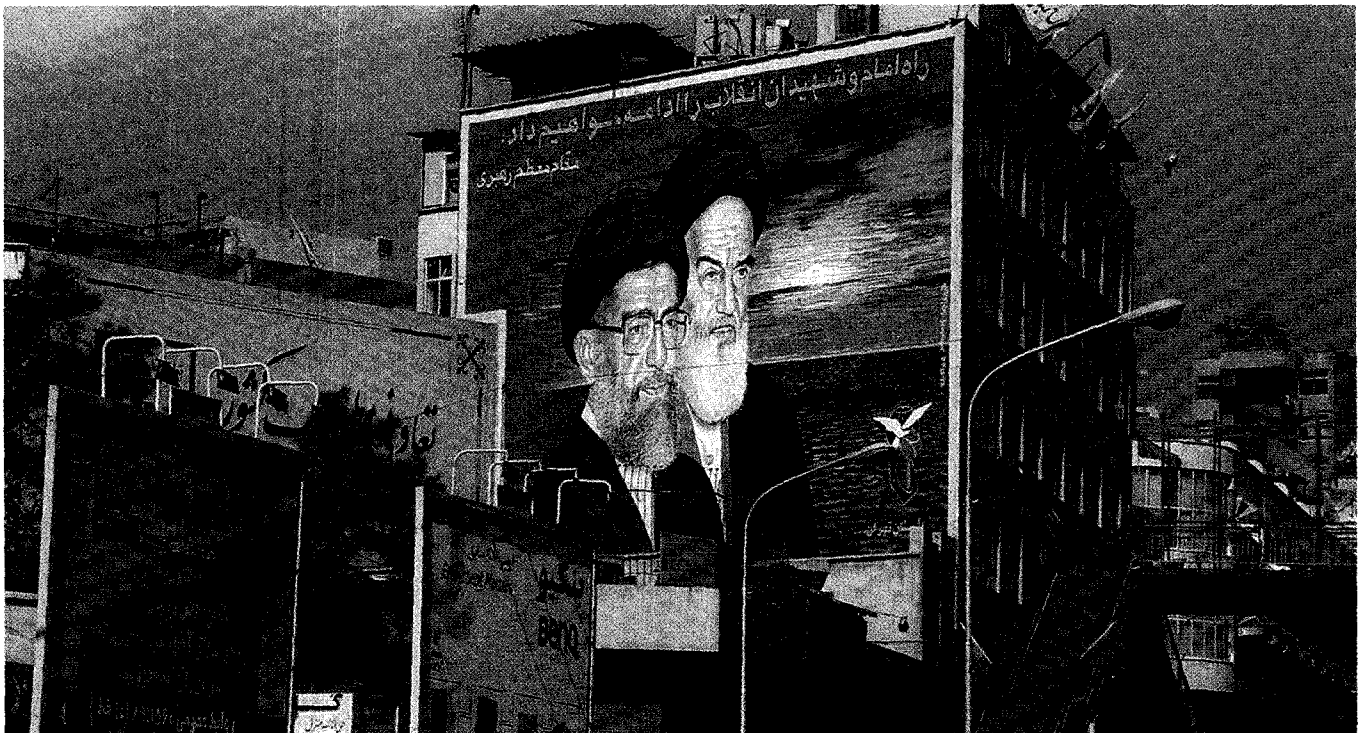
Iranian people at odds with the current regime in Tehran.

Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and other conservative clerics set the tone for much of Iran's foreign policy, to the chagrin of the more moderate conservatives and the embattled reformist groups in the government. Hardliners control the judiciary, the military and the huge Islamic foundations that make up more than 20 percent of the economy. But most importantly, the conservatives hold the trump card of the system—they form the Guardian Council, the group of 12 appointed officials who, along with Khamenei, have veto power over any legislation offered up by the reformist-dominated parliament. The council, composed of six religious leaders and six Muslim lawyers, is required to ensure that the Iranian law conforms to the principles of Islam.

These conservatives, and the Guardian Council in particular, are the very same "unelected few" that Bush has charged with

of life and socioeconomic backgrounds," says Afshin Molavi, an Iranian-born, Washington-based journalist who covered Iran for *Reuters* and *The Washington Post* and is the author of *Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys Across Iran*. Iranians chafe, Molavi says, at "the state of the economy, the failed promises of the revolution and the reform movement, and this intrusive meddling in people's private lives." Iran's economic hardship makes America's land-of-plenty image very tempting for Iranians who think a financial relationship with the United States could bring much-needed capital to the country.

Iranians seem as interested in America's social freedoms as they do in its economic wealth, although Iran itself has become more socially permissive since the landslide election of Khatami in 1997 and his re-election in 2001. As we sat in a fancy hotel in Esfahan, a large city about 250 miles south of Tehran, our guide, Reza, sipped tea and regarded the young couples around us.



The ayatollahs, past and present, still tower over the forces of moderation in the Islamic Republic.

repressing the Iranian people's desire for freedom. Indeed, a growing number of Iranians are pushing for true democratic reform, a better relationship with the United States, and an end to economic and political isolation. Although a more democratic, transparent and accountable Iran "will continue to have policy differences with the United States," according to University of South Florida political-science professor Mohsen Milani, it would "have the wisdom and popular legitimacy to say, 'Let's talk.'" Such a government, Milani says, would base a potential relationship with the United States on "mutual respect, reciprocity, minimizing the differences ... [and being] willing to cooperate on commonalities."

While the government railed at the term "axis of evil" ("drunken shouts of American officials," thundered Khamenei; "war mongering and insulting," denounced reformist President Mohammed Khatami), some living in Iran felt that the label wasn't entirely inaccurate. "There's so much frustration in all walks

They were murmuring and discreetly holding hands. We were in a tourist area, and it seemed a safe place for behavior that would have been unthinkable even a few years ago. Indeed, the conservative element in Iran still frowns on public displays of affection between unrelated men and women. "You cannot tell the young people they can't be young," Reza said. "It is unnatural." But the freedoms still come with a price. They're either justified with an ingenious faux-Muslim veneer—"The Prophet Muhammad would have allowed women's motorcycle lessons!"—or are enjoyed with trepidation at the consequences of being caught or punished.

On one Tehran street corner, a wall splashed with the forbidding countenances of the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (the father of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, which overthrew the shah and introduced a new government in Iran) and Khamenei rise over a busy intersection. Just to the side of the mural stands a billboard bearing words in small English script:

"Enjoyment Matters." This juxtaposition illustrates a leitmotif I saw throughout Iran during my 10-day trip there last fall: an obeisance to those in power coupled with a kind of hedonistic rebelliousness. Take the availability of Barbie, for example. In 2002, the Islamic Republic condemned the doll—with its buxom figure, revealing clothes, capitalistic lifestyle and that naughtiest of accessories, a boyfriend—as a "wanton" agent of loose Western morals. Instead of Barbie, toy stores were to push Dara and Sara, the official brother-and-sister dolls of the Islamic Republic. Sara is 8 years old, a year shy of the age when girls must start wearing the Islamic headscarf and loose overcoat. Yet she's sold with headscarves anyway. But at an upscale toy store in Tehran, merchants had managed to both obey the edict and demonstrate its futility: One or two Dara and Sara dolls were displayed on countertops, while behind them loomed a wall of pink Barbie boxes that rose from floor to ceiling.

In the same neighborhood, Reza sought out a small, mustached man, who led us into a darkened stairway in a mall and pulled out a large garbage bag. It was filled with bootleg CDs of music from Iranian singers living in Los Angeles. We purchased some as Reza cheerfully repeated his mantra about Iranians being able to do everything we can in America. You just need to know the right people to buy music, or in case the police confiscate your tapes.

For more serious breaches of Islamic law, the punishments are more severe. News of public hangings, random arrests and interrogations have taken a toll on Iranians' sense of security, which is further exacerbated by the lack of a free press to counteract rumors and conspiracy theories. In a perfect Foucauldian moment, two Iranian friends attempted to point out *komiteh*, volunteer "morals police" who don't hesitate to beat women showing too much hair or couples holding hands. We couldn't find them, but it didn't matter. They were inside peoples' heads—everyone had a friend of a friend who had just been beaten; the *komiteh* were simultaneously everywhere and nowhere—and the threat of brutality was enough to foster Iranians' inner vigilance over their own actions.

IN THIS BIG BROTHER ATMOSPHERE, IT'S NOT SURPRISING that the students have rebelled. Sixty percent of the population is under 25, and the children of the Islamic Revolution have little memory or fondness for the revolution's ideals. The young people know only crushing unemployment, officially estimated at 16 percent and unofficially at 25 percent. The constraints on their personal and political freedoms, and the rising rates of HIV infection and drug use, are also pressing concerns.

The chain of events that unleashed student anger most recently began last June, when noted University of Hamedan professor Hashem Aghajari presented a speech on the nature of "Islamic Protestantism." Iran's ruling clerics had told young people that they couldn't understand the meaning of the Koran on their own, Aghajari said. The mullahs, he explained, had twisted the faith to justify their own actions and misdeeds, from living lives of luxury in the face of widespread hardship to torturing human-rights activists. "We need a religion that respects the rights of all," Aghajari declared, "a progressive religion rather than a traditional religion that tramples the people."

Five months after making his speech, Aghajari was handed

a death sentence for blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad and insulting the imams and state religious officials. Students began protesting soon afterward, and their demands spread beyond Aghajari's pardon and release. They called for the release of all political prisoners. They took up the cause of three pollsters who are on trial for espionage. (The pollsters had publicized their findings that 74.4 percent of Iranians want a dialogue with the United States.) And weary of Khatami's unfulfilled promises of reform, the students called for his resignation, along with that of the head of the judiciary.

The protests have significant symbolic value, says Haleh Esfandiari, head of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars' Middle East Project, but she also noted the resiliency of the current regime. "I don't think regimes change because a couple thousand students protest ... but the students' call is reverberating." Iranian human-rights lawyer, activist and former political prisoner Mehrangiz Kar is more hopeful. The students have thrown down the gauntlet, she says, by demanding the one thing she says may shake the system: a referendum on what kind of government the Iranian people want.

These tactics seem to be working. In mid-November, Khamenei was forced by popular demand to call for a review of Aghajari's case. In early December, Khatami criticized the arrest of the three pollsters, whose survey had been commissioned by the reformist parliament. Hard-liners walked out of this same parliament when reformists urged them to listen to the students.

Most crucial of all, the protests are highlighting two key bills that Khatami recently proposed. One, preventing the Guardian Council from vetting potential political candidates, has already passed parliament. That bill could allow for a stronger reformist than Khatami, or even secular candidates who can't currently hold political positions, to run for office. The other bill would expand Khatami's powers to suspend judicial convictions he found unconstitutional. It's likely the Guardian Council will veto the bills. Preparing for that scenario, reformists are debating whether to call for a referendum or to stage a mass resignation from all government posts, which could plunge Iran into a crisis.

For some, change can't come soon enough. On the day I left Iran, Reza and a friend studying there began to debate politics. My friend, who had grown up abroad and returned to Iran for the first time as an adult, had recently sat on the men's section of the bus rather than stand (the women's section in the rear was full). "Why should I stand if there is room?" she asked, eyes flashing. She hated the double lives, the lack of freedom and opportunities, and the hypocrisy of the government. "Why lead a life that is a lie?" she asked. Reza responded just as hotly. "You don't understand," he explained. "Iran is a Muslim country. Change must come slowly."

He walked outside and stood in the mountain air (we had driven up from Tehran to escape the choking smog). I turned over his words in my head, tried to reconcile them with the man who had mentioned that if he could go to the United States, he would live there. This despite his pride when talking of Iran's beauty and warmth, his desire to debunk tourists' misperceptions. I asked Reza why he would want to leave the country he so clearly loved.

He struggled, and finally answered. "Because," he said, "change in Iran is too slow." ♦

Dr. Frist to the Rescue

How not to fix Medicare

BY MARCIA ANGELL

SEN. BILL FRIST (R-TENN., WHOM *THE NEW YORK Times* has taken to calling *Dr. Frist*), the Senate majority leader and President Bush's new fair-haired boy, wants to fix Medicare. This is the same Bill Frist whose father founded a for-profit hospital chain, Hospital Corporation of America (HCA). Headed by Frist's brother, HCA merged with another hospital chain, Columbia, to form the behemoth Columbia/HCA. After riding high for a few years, Columbia/HCA (now again called HCA) came crashing down when it was charged with massively defrauding Medicare and other insurers. So far it has paid \$1.7 billion in fines to settle those charges, and its legal troubles are not over.

Not surprisingly, Bush and Frist would fix Medicare by making it more like the fragmented, for-profit insurance system that people under 65 find increasingly unreliable, inadequate and arbitrary. If Democrats engage this issue properly, it should be one of the epic battles of this session of Congress.

It's not clear that Medicare needs fundamental fixing. It succeeds very well in its main purpose, which is to provide nearly every American over the age of 65 with a uniform package of benefits. Those benefits cannot be taken away from anyone or reduced for any reason. And because it is a non-profit, single-payer system, Medicare is fairly efficient, with low overhead costs.

Still, Medicare could use some fixing at the margins. It pays doctors too much for doing high-technology tests and procedures and too little for examining and talking with patients. Its benefit package needs updating to provide long-term care and drug benefits. And its finances need overhauling. More about this shortly.

SO IS THIS THE KIND OF FIXING SEN. FRIST HAS IN MIND? Not on your life. Sen. Frist and his White House friends want the very opposite. They want to introduce commercial competition, encourage Medicare recipients to join managed-care plans, cap what Medicare will pay for services and pass more of the costs on to recipients themselves. Yes,

they include a prescription-drug benefit, but apparently without any regulation of the pharmaceutical industry's prices or of the drugs covered. Most Republicans favor paying private insurers to offer limited drug coverage under Medicare. Drug companies would remain free to charge whatever they like for expensive, new brand-name drugs often no better and sometimes worse than older, generic drugs. In other words, Sen. Frist and the White House would introduce the blessings of the private health market to Medicare.

Let's take a closer look at those blessings. The majority of people under the age of 65 are covered by employer-sponsored private insurers, mostly through investor-owned managed-care plans. Health benefits vary widely and are often grossly inadequate. The hallmark of this market is the extent to which health dollars are diverted from medical care to corporate profits and overhead. Private insurers keep an average of 14 percent of premiums for their own profits and overhead; they outsource other tasks, such as utilization review and case management, to other for-profit businesses that also divert money from actual care. Compare that with the less than 3 percent overhead costs of Medicare.

Managed-care plans maximize profits in several ways. They try to avoid marketing their products to people likely to get sick. They cut costs by stinting on medical services and making patients pay more out of pocket. They usually limit the choice of doctors or charge higher premiums for the privilege of free choice. No wonder Americans hate managed care.

In fact, surveys have shown that Medicare is far more popular with its recipients than the private health-care system is. Furthermore, despite every effort to reduce costs by limiting services, private insurance premiums are now rising at double-digit rates—much faster than the rate of inflation for Medicare. Why on earth would anyone want to visit these conditions on Medicare? One might as well wish for locusts.

FURTHERMORE, WE HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE WITH PUSHING Medicare recipients into private managed-care plans, and it was a disaster. In the early 1990s, Congress directed Medicare to encourage seniors to enroll in managed-care plans as a means of containing costs. For each senior, Medicare paid health plans 95 percent of the average Medicare costs per beneficiary in that geographic region. If the health-plan spon-

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sors could provide coverage for less, they could pocket what they saved. Seniors were lured by the promise of smaller co-payments and broader benefits, such as coverage for prescription drugs and eyeglasses.

But look at what happened. The plans—deliberately—attracted mainly the youngest and healthiest of seniors, people who cost far less than 95 percent of the average. According to one study, Medicare ended up paying 12 percent more for enrollees in managed-care plans than it would have paid for the *same* patients outside the plans. “Choice” was a bonanza for the managed-care companies, but not for consumers or taxpayers. As patients aged or became seriously ill, they often left the plans and returned to the regular Medicare system, where coverage was usually more accessible and they could choose their own doctors and see specialists if they wanted.

When Medicare officials grasped that they were losing money, not saving it, on managed care, they cut back on reimbursement levels. At that point, deprived of their excess profits, private health plans began to bail out. Many curbed the benefits of Medicare recipients or stopped accepting them altogether (a couple of million seniors were simply dumped). Why would Sen. Frist, or anyone for that matter, want to repeat that failed experiment?

the mid-1960s, when medicine was quite different. Long-term care for chronic diseases was less important then (the focus was on acute diseases), as were prescription drugs for outpatients (there were not many effective drugs and they were cheap). That is why Medicare does not cover these things. But conditions have changed. Long-term care and outpatient prescription drugs are now not only medically necessary but also very expensive. It makes no sense for Medicare to continue to exclude them. However, any prescription-drug benefit would need to be restricted to the least-expensive effective drugs and include a mechanism for bargaining with drug companies for the best prices. Otherwise it would be an unaffordable windfall for the pharmaceutical industry.

The funding of Medicare also needs some attention. Medicare is divided into two parts. Part A, which covers hospital care and skilled nursing and home health care, is funded by a 2.9 percent payroll tax. Part B, which covers doctors’ services and outpatient care, comes out of general tax revenues and monthly payments from recipients. Those payments, now \$58.70 per month, have increased over the years. Seniors are also responsible for substantial co-payments for services. The result is that Medicare recipients now pay more out of pocket (in constant dollars) for their health care than they did before Medicare

The future of Medicare is in the hands of someone whose family business is paying enormous fines to settle charges of defrauding that very same program.

The answer may lie in a conservative ideology that believes private enterprise is always better and—even in the face of abundant evidence to the contrary—more efficient in providing just about anything, including a social service such as health care. And it may also lie in Republican gratitude for the lavish financial support the party receives from the health and pharmaceutical industries. But Sen. Frist’s own background is surely an important factor. His family is in the for-profit health-care business. Although he himself is said to have put his large interest in HCA into a blind trust (with the approval of the Senate Select Committee on Ethics), it still remains true that whatever is good for HCA is good for Bill Frist. And it is undeniable that Medicare policies affect the fortunes of the company. Yet Frist has become an important voice on health policy in the Senate, and now that he is majority leader, his influence will grow. It is astonishing that this obvious conflict of interest has been so little noted.

HOW, THEN, SHOULD WE SHORE UP MEDICARE? ITS fees should be adjusted to reward high-tech medicine less and time spent with patients more. It needs a mechanism for discouraging physicians from providing unnecessary services to generate more income. Other advanced countries with single-payer systems achieve that. In Canada, for example, doctors who are found to do much more than the average number of tests in their specialty may have their practices reviewed.

In addition, the benefit package should be updated to reflect current medical realities. Medicare, remember, was crafted in

was instituted. That tends to undermine the whole purpose of the program, which is to shield vulnerable seniors from the burdens of illness. I would favor eliminating the monthly Part B premiums and greatly reducing co-payments, as well as shifting more of the cost to general federal revenue.

Whether these reforms would have a net effect of increasing or reducing total Medicare costs is hard to say. Reducing overtreatment by physicians would save money. On the other hand, expanding benefits, eliminating Part B premiums and reducing co-payments would increase costs to the program. Seniors themselves would certainly save money, as would Medicaid, which now pays for much of long-term care. The fact is, countries with single-payer systems get more appropriate care for less overall money. Advances in technology and the aging population may well raise total health-care costs over time. But that’s all the more reason to spend health dollars efficiently. And if we Americans want to spend a little more of our gross domestic product on health care, that’s our choice.

Sen. Frist and the White House have it exactly backward. Turning Medicare over to the private sector would duplicate all of the health market’s arbitrariness, cost shifting and inefficiency. Instead, we should be thinking about strengthening and expanding Medicare as a public program. After all, it’s the only part of our health-care system that works even reasonably well. And if irony were not dead, we would surely notice how strange it is that the future of Medicare is in the hands of someone whose family business is paying enormous fines to settle charges of defrauding that very same program. ♦

The Write Stuff

From cult to culture, Dave Eggers and Co. are taking their idealism to the streets.

BY LORRAINE ADAMS

THERE IS A LONG, SLOW LINE. THE QUEUE OF narrow-shouldered boys in thrift-store shirts and black-tighted girls with Emily Dickinson stares is blocking aisles in a Washington bookstore. The faithful look to be just out of college or just past 30. They thread through the door and onto the sidewalk.

They are waiting for Dave Eggers to sign copies of his first novel. Eggers' charisma is not readily apparent. His hair is frizz, his eyes scrunched, his shirt untucked. He looks vitamin deficient. "I think," says bookstore clerk Keltie Hawkins, "his appeal has something to do with being a combination of cool and approachable." His is an unsexy cool—it comes from a mawkish life story. When Eggers was 21, his parents died of cancer within a month of each other, leaving him to raise his 8-year-old brother. Seven years later, Eggers' 2000 memoir, *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*, became a best seller. Its story of a near-child raising a child resonated with a generation marked by divorce, working parents and what Eggers terms "a loose weak human chaos of emotion."

A Heartbreaking Work was published by Simon & Schuster, but the novel he is signing in the Washington bookstore is a product of his own publishing company. Eggers, who once quit a plum editing job at *Esquire* magazine in disgust, abhors corporate publishing. His first novel is available only on his Web site and at independent bookstores. Despite these handicaps, *You Shall Know Our Velocity* has been on *The Washington Post's* best-seller list for months. An *On the Road* for the millennial generation, it follows two young men dispensing \$32,000 to impoverished people across Africa and Eastern Europe. Most reviewers have either derided its puerility or raved about its prose. Few have taken seriously its characters' confrontation with economic inequities.

Most observers see Eggers and his fans as existing outside politics. But Eggers' literary superstardom is prompting an alternative culture that has grown up around him over the last five years. It is a San Francisco- and Brooklyn-based community of writers, artists, designers and, increasingly, children—with a growing national following. They are the readers, contributors and designers of the literary journal-cum-Web site *McSweeney's*

(first published in 1998) and *McSweeney's Books*. (Eleven have been published so far.) They are, especially in the last year, the audiences at *McSweeney's*-sponsored conferences, readings and concerts across the country. They are idealistic about education, sentimental about children and impatient with the homogeneous culture that corporations produce.

You Shall Know Our Velocity is dedicated to Beth, Eggers' older sister who was a law student at the time their parents died and also contributed to the parenting of the youngest Eggers, Christopher. In 2001, Beth took a fatal overdose of an antidepressant combined with an over-the-counter pain reliever, acetaminophen. Once a family of six, the Eggers clan now numbers three. How many other upper-middle-class, suburban midwestern families can claim such familiarity with premature death and the parenting improvisations that have largely been the province of the precarious poor?

That familiarity may bear some relationship to Eggers' creation last April of a way station for the less parented in San Francisco's Mission District, a working-class Hispanic neighborhood.

Called 826 Valencia (after its street address), the learning emporium has a reading room done in Moroccan-style furnishings where young people can study. There is also a college-scholarship program for students interested in writing. Eggers and about 400 volunteers teach writing and comics creation, run workshops on SAT preparation and help kids launch student publications. They deploy 20 to 30 tutors at a time into classrooms at the request of teachers for one-on-one work on student writing. "They're great," said James Kass, executive director of Youth Speaks, a San Francisco, New York and Seattle non-profit program for teenagers that fosters the literary arts. "They have a real belief that they can help teachers and public schools that are overextended and underfunded, because they can attract a lot more volunteers than most nonprofits because of Dave Eggers. They've done a lot in a short time." (Eggers and *McSweeney's* President Barb Bersche declined to be interviewed. "With our tight deadlines for our upcoming books, tutoring and teaching classes at 826 Valencia, and juggling traveling for speaking engagements, we really haven't been able to participate in any interviews all year," Bersche wrote in an e-mail.)

Beyond confirming how the center works, 826 Director Ninive Calegari also declined to be quoted, saying, "We've been asking people not to focus on us. There are so many nonprofits

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in San Francisco doing such great things, we're kind of shying away from any publicity." She has a point. The Mission Learning Center, for example, in existence for 30 years, tutors students who read below their grade level. Aim High, in its 16th year, is an academic- and cultural-enrichment program for motivated middle-school students. Less than a year old, 826 may merely be another well-intentioned but ultimately micro attempt to solve a macro social problem—the failure of urban education.

THE NINE ISSUES OF *MC SWEENEY'S*, LINED UP ON A SHELF, are a curious collection. One is composed of 14 color pamphlets in a box. One is a short-spined, cloth-covered oblong. One's front cover is blank. Inside, the graphics are luscious, funny and playful, culled from children's illustrations, scientific drawings, museum catalogues and flea-market memorabilia. This mishmash is the *McSweeney's* aesthetic. There is an implied *McSweeney's* economics: What is valuable is made in batches, the hand of its maker much in evidence. There is a *McSweeney's* psychology: Previously outmoded warmth is defended with a force field of self-consciousness. And there is *McSweeney's* endorsed music: Exemplified by the band They Might Be Giants, it is a cross between understated rock and nursery chant, with quizzically cerebral lyrics. The band appeared with Eggers and other *McSweeney's* writers at performances last fall in Washington, Philadelphia, New York and elsewhere.

You're the type that won't give to a street person; you'll think you're doing them harm. But who's condescending then? You withhold and you run counter to your instincts. There is disparity and our instinct is to create parity, immediately. Our instinct is to split our bank account with the person who has nothing. But you're talking behind seven layers of denial and justification. If it feels good it is good, and today, at the ocean, we met a man living in a half-finished hut, and he was tall and had a radio and we gave him about \$700 and it was good. It can't be taken from us, and you cannot soil it with words like condescending and subjective, fey and privileged words, and you cannot pretend that you know a better way. You try it! You do it! We gave and received love! How can you deprive us of that?

The *McSweeney's* generation brings to mind another that thought parents had it all wrong—the London counterculture of the early 1960s. As Shawn Levy points out in his book *Ready, Steady, Go! The Smashing Rise and Giddy Fall of Swinging London*, at first there was little that was political about iconoclastic fashion (Mary Quant and Twiggy), new music (the Beatles and the Rolling Stones) and defiant lifestyles (illegal drugs and sexual license). These trends spread to the United States, but there they became, as they did not in the United Kingdom, transformative political movements—civil rights, feminism and Vietnam War protest.

Could *McSweeney's* alternative culture be a precursor, as

The *McSweeney's* generation brings to mind another that thought parents had it all wrong—the London counterculture of the early 1960s.

But until recently, there was only the most primitive *McSweeney's* politics. In his memoir, Eggers writes proudly of the idiotic magazine he founded in the early 1990s, *Might*. He describes Lead ... or Leave and Third Millennium, two national advocacy groups designed to mobilize a youth version of the AARP to fight for Social Security reform, writing, "We make contact with these organizations, pledge solidarity, though to be honest we have absolutely no idea what they're talking about."

Eggers writes that the magazine lionizes Wendy Kopp, "at twenty-five the founder of Teach for America, which places recent college graduates in understaffed or -financed schools, mostly urban. We love people like this, those who are starting massive organizations, trying new approaches to age-old problems and getting the word out about it, with great PR, terrific publicity photos, available in black and white or color transparency." The smirk at the end is a lot like Eggers' take on political engagement: "It's like the '60s! 'Look! Look,' we say to one another, 'at the imbalances, the glaring flaws of the world, aghast, amazed. Look how things are! Look at how, for instance, there are all these homeless people! Look at how they have to defecate all over the streets, where we have to walk! Look at how high rents are! Look at how the banks charge these hidden fees when you use their ATMs!'"

Eggers' novel *Velocity* has a different outlook. Here the narrator criticizes his mother for mocking his madcap globalized charity:

swinging London was, to a new political physics? Could *McSweeney's* be analogous to the 1950s *City Lights Journal*, City Lights Publishers and the Beats—Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Jack Kerouac?

THERE IS NOT A PROTEST FLAVOR TO *MC SWEENEY'S*. THIS, along with its relative indifference to drugs and sex, separates it from the Beats, the forerunners of Haight-Ashbury's hippies. But there is, as there was in swinging London, inventiveness. Some of this comes from *McSweeney's* "why not?" sense that there *are* ways around the mega-consolidated culture manufacturers. "Perhaps Dave's most political act is his attempted rebuke of the publishing industry and the chains," says a New York editor.

Until recently, archness had been the hallmark of *McSweeney's*. A recent issue shows that attitude to have softened. At the top of its cover are the words "thankful" and "emboldened." Right below the magazine's title are the words, "The hot-blooded life-saving presumption of perpetual, irrational or more likely, irreducibly rational good will." The motto for this issue, also on the cover, reads, "We give you sweaty hugs." The issue is dedicated to the students of 826 Valencia.

There are more overtly political stories and essays, among them William T. Vollmann's "Three Meditations on Death," about Yugoslavia, the Holocaust and Vietnam; K. Kvashay-Boyle's "Saint Chola," about a Muslim girl's vilification in junior high; and Gabe Hudson's "Notes from a Bunker Along

Highway 8," about the Gulf War.

One of the touchstones of *McSweeney's* has been Eggers' expansion of the obligatory copyright language into an expanded jujitsu lampooning the media. In the recent issue, Eggers devotes this section to the work at 826 Valencia:

The students have been astounding. Many of the stories written by our younger visitors involve nautical themes, because directly in front of the writing lab is our new store, where we sell quality pirate supplies at reasonable prices. The store's proceeds pay the rent at 826 Valencia, in toto, because we expected and have been correct in thinking that people were sick of having to drive all the way to the mall to buy swabbing mops, planks and millet. Behind the store and the reading lab are our new editorial offices where we assemble all the *McSweeney's* books and journals, with our full-time staff of two and the help of many outstanding interns. These three pieces—the publishing, the lab, the store—interact in wonderful and unexpected ways and can't be explained here. We feel very thankful for the life that exists at 826 Valencia each day, the noise it generates and the kids who come in to learn or laugh or, for some, to sit and read quietly.

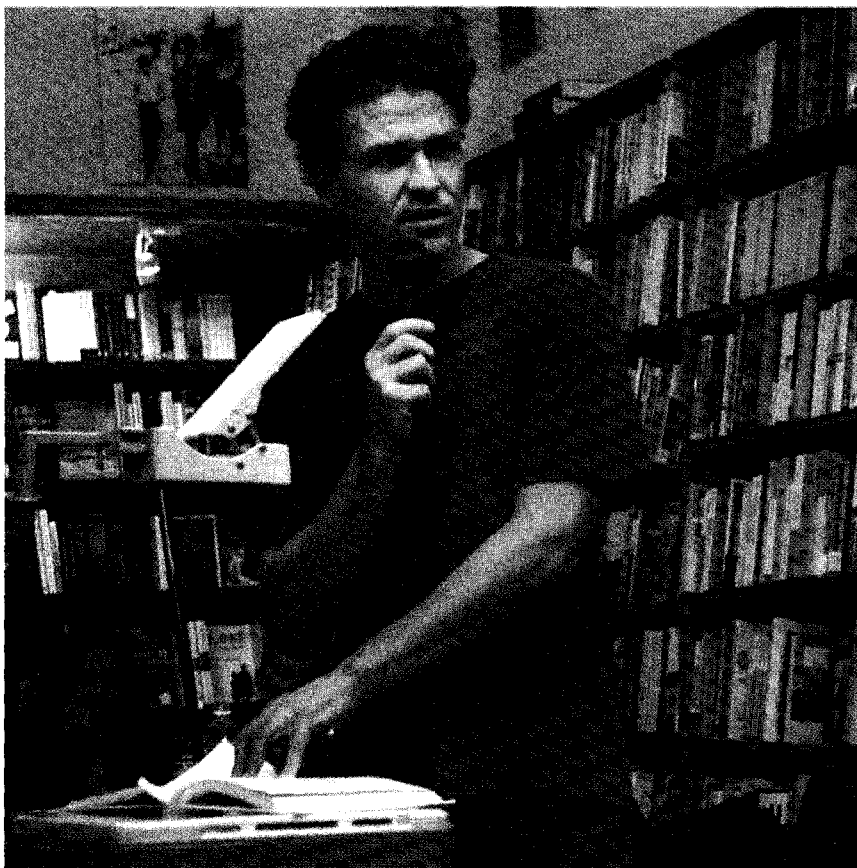
IN 1840, RALPH WALDO EMERSON AND Margaret Fuller, founding editors of the *Dial*, published a letter to readers. The journal, Emerson wrote, was united against any convention that was "turning us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks only backward, which asks only such a future as the past, which suspects improvement, and holds nothing so much in horror as new views and the dreams of youth. ... And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our *Dial* on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine. Let it be one cheerful rational voice amidst the din of mourners and polemics."

While *McSweeney's* is hardly the *Dial*, and Eggers is no Emerson, there are interesting similarities. Optimism is only one. There are also commonalities between 826 Valencia and Bronson Alcott's Temple School, founded in 1834, with its colorblind admissions and emphasis on imagination to foster learning among children.

McSweeneyites also seem related to the pragmatist tradition, described in Louis Menand's *The Metaphysical Club*, a collective biography of Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey. While not their intellectual equals by any means, the *McSweeneyites* do seem to share that quartet's belief that ideas are, as Menand writes, "tools—like forks and knives and microchips—that people devise to cope with the world in which they find themselves. They believed that ideas are produced not by individuals, but by groups of individuals—that ideas are social. ... Ideas should never become ideologies—either justifying the

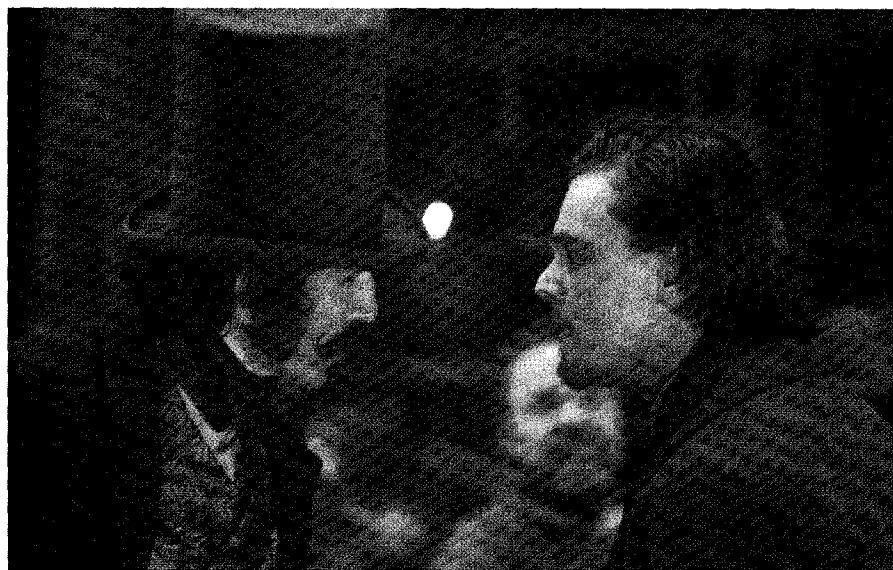
status quo, or dictating some transcendent imperative for renouncing it."

Ferlinghetti, the Beat poet who founded the City Lights bookstore, explained in a 1997 interview that ideology, indeed political engagement, were at first taboo to him and his peers. "The Beat ... is the cool citizen, the cool cat who will not stick his neck out far enough to be engaged," he said. Today, the Beats are associated with revolutionary politics. But the Beats never wrote about racial segregation or the second-class status of women. Today, the Transcendentalists (who *did* write about abolishing slavery and women's rights) have been drained of their engagement, becoming in the popular imagination little more than nature lovers extolling the beauty of Walden Pond and renouncing society.



The voice of a new generation: rising literary star Dave Eggers of *McSweeney's*

No matter where Eggers and *McSweeney's* stand in relation to these important parts of American intellectual and cultural history, it is hard to ignore their new direction toward the political. There is a link between what Eggers experienced personally and his sensitivity to the need for mentoring that honors the connection between the seriousness of learning and play. He challenges—in his graphic innovations at *McSweeney's*, in his shunning of corporate control of writing, in his desire to teach children to write, not just read—accepted rules of publishing and pedagogy. Maybe he is an opportunist and a huckster. Very soon, like Jay McInerney and Tama Janowitz, the so-called voices of my generation, he may fall into oblivion and inconsequence. But the readers who wait in line for him will remain, and so will the hopes they harbor for innovation. ♦



Big Apple brawling: Daniel Day-Lewis (left) and Leonardo DiCaprio face off.

Scorsese's Low Score

Gangs of New York is mere filmmaking, not mythmaking.

BY JAMES PARKER

LET US HEARKEN BACK TO A time when gangs ruled the world. Gangs sizing each other up, puffed with pride, wagging their weaponry, painstakingly stylized in diction and dress. There were the Bowery Boys and the Forty Thieves, the Plug Uglies and the Dead Rabbits, the riders of Rohan and the Uruk-hai, the hobbits, the elves, the ents. And when Bill the Butcher and his crew finally faced the drooling host of Saruman the White at Helm's Deep (you know, in the Sixth Ward, where Isengard meets Broadway) and Frodo Baggins crossed swords with Leonardo DiCaprio, what a reckoning was there!

Or am I confused? If so, I hope I may be pardoned: Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York* and Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* were released in the same week, and the tremendous mishmash of legends has me intoxicated.

The odd thing is, of the two movies, it's *The Two Towers* that feels closer to home—that feels *realer*, so to speak—and *Gangs* that looks like the monster conceit. Enthralled by the trials of a ring-

bearing hobbit in Middle Earth, we turn to Scorsese's vision of turmoil in the underclass of 19th-century New York City—only to find it artificial, overproduced, unbelievable.

This is perplexing because of all directors, Scorsese is the one we might have expected to best handle this material. His *Gangs*—chronicling successive waves of Irish immigration, the rise of Tammany Hall and the Draft Riots of 1863—is amateur sociology, and amateur sociology is something he has shown himself to be very good at. *Casino* was a shadow history of Las Vegas' birth, of the chthonic, criminal forces that shaped the desert. And what was *Mean Streets* but the tale of two rivalrous special-interest groups—the Church and the Mob—competing fiercely for the soul of a man? The sensation of threatened or collapsing order is one of Scorsese's moods, and he is capable of exploring it minutely. In *Mean Streets*, the fits of Charlie's epileptic cousin, Teresa, seemed to presage chaos, pop hysteria, upheaval—a world of crossed wires that would soon enough give birth to Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver*. Bickle's life is a bad

dream, and his cab moves through the neon-bright billows of steam as through a contagion. *Gangs* is set in a different New York, but the battling diehards of the Five Points were no less acted upon, no less subject to societal forces. So why does Scorsese's investigation of them strike such a consistently false note?

The problem here is not that the film is fake; the problem is that it's not fake enough. Let's take a look, by way of explanation, at Scorsese's source text, Herbert Asbury's 1928 book *The Gangs of New York*. Asbury was a prolific journalist and author, with such titles as *Gem of the Prairie* and *The Devil of Pei-Ling* to his credit. And he was no hack: In *The Gangs of New York*, he was actually something of a master stylist, mixing penny-dreadful sensationalism with a more gentlemanly, almost antiquarian approach. For example: "Another attraction of Sportsmen's Hall, was ... Jack the Rat. For ten cents Jack would bite the head off a mouse, and for a quarter he would decapitate a rat."

The result is a genuinely epic effect, but it is a mode of the epic that has a Brechtian element of dryness to it, a droll historical detachment, as if the bard's chant were being heard through veils of cigarette smoke and the murmur of dinner guests. The listeners are not wringing their hands, in other words—they are nodding or shaking their heads, and giving the occasional low whistle of near disbelief.

It's the sort of storytelling voice that one hears in the Icelandic sagas, wherein an apparently casual sprawl of second- or third-hand reportage suddenly condenses, like a contraction of the mind's eye, into a single detail or, more acutely, a single line of direct speech. Nothing fazed the authors of the sagas, and their tales feature a free and constant traffic between nature and supernature: A murderous dispute between two farmers over grazing rights, for example, might be interrupted by the arrival of a troll or a lycanthrope.

Asbury knew that his New York story was similarly half-magical. His description of the titanic Mose, legendary leader of the Bowery Boys in the 1840s, is literally fantastic: Within a few hundred words, Mose is swimming the Hudson River in "two mighty strokes" and going

about “with a great fifty gallon keg of ale dangling from his belt in lieu of a canteen.” We can feel the mythopoeic energy of the populace flowing into this character, swelling and enhancing him with “vast tales” until he looms futuristically, New Yorkishly huge, the harbinger of a skyline to come.

This, precisely, is the energy missing from Scorsese’s film. The gangs were real but they were also mythical; their history, as Jorge Luis Borges noted in his foreword to Asbury’s book, “possesses all the confusion and cruelty of barbarian cosmologies.” It is as if the vileness and viciousness of existence around the Five Points pitched the area’s inhabitants back into some pre-Enlightenment darkness, deep into the slurry of the unconscious.

The opening scenes of *Gangs*—the prelude to a street battle between the Dead Rabbits and the Native Americans—seem to hint at this: As the Rabbits, deep in their cave, gear themselves for war, a thrilling cacophony of drums and a wheedling, inhuman fife set the mood—and the mood is barbarous. But then battle is joined, and the music switches to some sort of faux Celtic electro-rock, with processed beats and pipes swirling in lachrymose Irishry as the cleavers and slow-motion brickbats fly. A son witnesses the death of his father, and the pump of sentiment is primed: We understand that this is to be a story about love, revenge, redemption and various other numbed-out nouns.

Only Daniel Day-Lewis, playing (the heavily fictionalized) Bill the Butcher, is faithful to the tallness of Asbury’s tales; his performance towers over the movie, thrusting beanstalk-like into another dimension. Obviously refreshed by his well-documented stint as a shoemaker’s apprentice, Day-Lewis steals the show. Dressed like a Victorian time traveler in striped trousers and a stovepipe hat, he reels about on long, insectile legs, playing the Butcher with a ludicrous, fabulous intensity. The other actors are almost vaporized by his fire. (The buttery faces of Leonardo DiCaprio and Cameron Diaz, in particular, slide quickly from memory, and their characters’ love story is one of the slightest in recent film history.)

No one, of course, is better than

Scorsese at doing fights—bar fights, pool-hall fights, parking-lot fights. When it comes to the lurching biological rhythm of a good 10-minute brawl, he stands alone. The injured dignity of Joe Pesci, from *Raging Bull* through *Goodfellas* to *Casino*, is his great staging post for violence: Some perceived insult or violation produces a standoff, which leads to a buildup, which ends (generally) in a taking out.

What Scorsese can’t do, as *Gangs of New York* makes clear, is war: The planned, large-scale encounter—as op-

posed to the eruptive, highly personal on-slaught—defeats him. When the gangs collide en masse or when the soldiers fire upon the draft rioters, we are not stirred. The Battle of Helm’s Deep, on the other hand, in *The Two Towers*, was the best rendering of siege conditions since Michael Caine defended Rourke’s Drift in *Zulu*. Onscreen, at least, it doesn’t get much realer than that. ♦

JAMES PARKER is the Prospect’s film critic.

MEDIA

We Disport. We Deride.

It’s all attitude, all the time at FOX News.

BY TODD GITLIN

“FOX NEWS ALERT,” SCREAMS the screen, in red. “FOX NEWS LEARNS OF POSSIBLE THREAT TO NY HARBOR.” Do we have your attention now? Who cares if FOX’s reporter goes on to say that the New Year’s Eve threat is “uncorroborated, noncredible [sic] and suspect”? Attention will be paid.

Attention is television’s everyday grail—its prize, its power and glory, its advertisers’ delight and necessity. How to get it and keep it is about the only subject that network chiefs take seriously. There’s nothing new about this, but the means have been transformed. Pre-cable, in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, television news used to get attention with a compromise strategy: Put crisp voices over theatrical pictures. Crispness was an assurance of objectivity; objectivity was what the audience required. The stentorian voice of the movie newsreels wouldn’t comport well with the hush of the living room, but a restrained tone would certify that reasonable men (for males they were) were in charge.

Out in the field, the correspondent might get a little worked up, but the anchor was, well, the anchor, the well-ordered, unmoved mind, stoic and reliable (Walter

Cronkite, Chet Huntley) or faintly ironic (David Brinkley). It took the death of John F. Kennedy to put a catch in Cronkite’s throat. The pictures were assurances of objectivity—“See? This really happened!”—but at the same time they contained the promise that what mattered could be inspected, and thus, implicitly, that viewers as citizens were in charge. The network was keeping an eye on the world so that the viewer might tick off the facts, think, “Isn’t that interesting?” and feel flattered to be informed. The occasional specials, live hearings and documentaries impressed federal regulators and satisfied the news organizations’ sense of self-respect.

Came cable, and CNN modified the formula. Collecting snippets at all hours, it widened the viewer’s global reach, heightened his or her sense of being on top of things. CNN’s audience was meager—200,000 or 300,000 on normal days—but spiked during crises such as hijacks, earthquakes and, most massively and memorably, the Gulf War, with its Nintendo-like graphics. The crises worked: They collected eyeballs and eardrums. Decibels paid off. *Crossfire* demonstrated the theatrics of punditry.

Rival cable networks took the hint: Invest in barking heads and pump up

BREAKING NEWS: O. J., Monica, Chandra, et al. Enter Chris Matthews flinging hardballs on CNBC, barely pausing for breath between shouts. On Sunday mornings, major network newscasters went percussive, too, as NBC's Tim Russert and ABC's Sam Donaldson prosecuted the Clinton White House. Meanwhile, on the radio, Rush Limbaugh was bellowing his way into many millions of hearts and spleens, mixing a touch of mirth with a radio preacher's urgency and a demagogue's viciousness. The combination worked. Greetings, Don Imus. Enter FOX, breathless. All crisis, all the time.

In case you haven't noticed, it takes more to seize your attention now, to paralyze your itchy finger before it gets to the remote control. (At least this is what network news chiefs believe, and they're probably right.) It takes bombastic theme music. It takes bumpers—coming attractions to the news coming toward you after the commercial. It takes a screen crammed with a crawl, with a picture-within-a-picture, with ongoing Dow and weather reports. It takes a major investment in sets: The anchor stands suspended among the incoming images, even strides toward you. The barking heads, for their part, take over the bar room without having to get up on their feet for the brawl. Ever since John McLaughlin devised his formula for getting attention in the Reaganite 1980s, the pundit doesn't talk, he brays. Debate as percussion, public discourse as extreme sports. It's no surprise when FOX's military analyst, David Christian, declares, "For the military, [an Iraq war would be] the biggest Super Bowl."

To the problem of securing attention, the FOX News Channel has found a 24-7 solution: Get its hands around your neck. That's not just politics, it's commerce—or, rather, politics of the combative type as commerce. FOX News' chairman, Roger Ailes, is a political operative (George Bush Senior's, in fact) and a moneymaker. (Why should he have to choose? Proprietor Rupert Murdoch is both.) The commercial motive dovetails beautifully with a politics of muscularity and resentment. Over this is laid an objectivity scrim, the veil of "we report, you decide." But it's hard to believe that any

of FOX's 1.2 million daily prime-time viewers is fooled. The brashness and raucousness speak for themselves, as if much of the shows were broadcast from the middle-school lunchroom. The phony objectivity is the equivalent of Bill O'Reilly's phony populism—the tribute that tabloids pay to the quality press. O'Reilly, FOX's self-fancying man of the people, with the most watched show on cable TV and hours of daily radio to boot, still whines that he couldn't get on National Public Radio or the *NewsHour With Jim Lehrer* to talk about his best-selling book. No matter how many hours of radio and TV he gets, they are always keeping him out of their club. Richard Nixon lives.

Throughout the day, FOX's formula is consistent: attitude. Its anthem is all percussion, all the time. Even its weather report blares, and its morning show is raucous—a frat-house alternative to the other channels' goody-two-shoes presentation. Real guys and gals know how the world works. (Corollary: Only a wuss doesn't.) Goodness (Team Bush) faces off against Badness (Saddam Hussein, Kim Jong Il) as surely as brawling Sean Hannity mauls mild Alan Colmes. Animal House flies the flag. Show us a problem and we'll show you that they are responsible.

And the so-called liberal competition? The networks and CNN air snippets, not analyses. They snipe at corporate misdeeds but can't tell the difference between a Whitewater and an Enron. They show no interest in totalities. They do not connect dots. The links among oil companies, military strategies, global warming and an oil-soaked administration escape them. They marvel, they wink but they do not fuse their observations into vision or derision.

Could liberals fight back? In a provocative book, *The Sound Bite Society*, Jeffrey Scheuer argued that television's formats, not just its ownership, tilt rightward because liberals are partial to complexity whereas television prefers simplicity. (Radio, too.) If a liberal is, as Robert Frost is said to have said, "a man too broadminded to take his own side in a quarrel," a conservative idea of a quarrel is a fight against straw wimps.

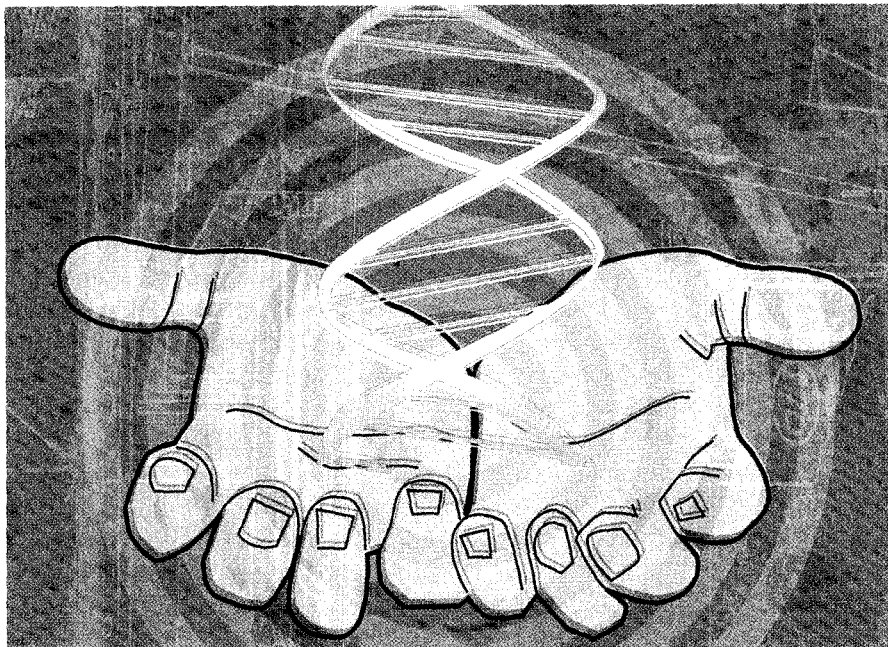
Today young liberals aspire to write for *The West Wing*, *The Sopranos* and like en-

tertainments, not to rival the pundit careers of Limbaugh and George Will. They know where the jobs are waiting and where they are not. It's indisputably a massive disadvantage not to own a network. And we don't really know whether a liberal FOX News Channel is imaginable because the experiment hasn't been undertaken. It wouldn't be cheap. Liberal moguls, Murdoch wannabes, even if their pockets were deep enough, have not materialized, though a few of them are belatedly talking a good show. If the cable space opened up, would talented liberal loudmouths learn to raise their voices, overcome their ambivalence and mop the floor with the right's shoddy arguments? Would they take off the gloves and remind their audiences who their opponents are? The histrionic gifts of Paul Begala and James Carville, currently sharing *Crossfire*, suggest that the answer is yes. But there's no way to know other than to try.

The fate of Trent Lott sounds an auspicious note for liberals, but would his ascendancy have lasted so long if liberals had a bulldog network of their own? For two decades, Lott had been honoring the glory days of the Confederacy and its Jim Crow sequel—without anybody noticing. John Ashcroft, among other top Republicans, had taken to the pages of *Southern Partisan* to record the party's indelible debts to Jefferson Davis—without making news. What if the Counter-FOX Network had been reporting on these guys—what they believed, where they came from—over the years?

Liberal radio and TV—those might give Tom Daschle a backbone transplant and put some fight in congressional Democrats. As Eric Alterman argues in his forthcoming book *What Liberal Media?*, the right has been "working the ref" for years, screaming "liberal bias" so fiercely and insistently that it got the established media to bend over backward to prove they weren't liberal after all. What if the centrist media had to look over their left shoulders for a change? ♦

TODD GITLIN is a professor of journalism and sociology at Columbia University and the author of *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*.



The New Facts of Life

BY MELVIN KONNER

The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature

By Steven Pinker. Viking Press, 509 pages, \$27.95

Darwinian Politics: The Evolutionary Origin of Freedom

By Paul H. Rubin. Rutgers University Press, 256 pages, \$25.00

AMONG THE CALAMITIES OF the 20th century were vast social experiments that tried to transform humanity with disastrous consequences. The Nazi experiment, based on the notion that evil is inborn in certain races, rejected education as a means of correction and instead pursued the extermination of millions of alleged incorrigibles. It drew upon a then-legitimate scientific tradition that had been widely accepted in Western countries for half a century. The Khmer Rouge experiment, based on the contrasting notion that complete "re-education" is possible, attempted to change the behavior of millions of Cambodians and killed them if they resisted change. Presumably their deaths would serve as salutary examples for survivors. Both these vicious programs, if they did not derive from theories of human nature, clearly derived

comfort from them, and should lay to rest permanently the claim that such theories do not matter.

The question, of course—after getting the right theories—is *how* they should matter. Both of these books consider the implications for society of a new theory, which if it leans toward the inborn-nature side of the ledger does so in a more modest and sophisticated way than such theories have in the past. The importance of genes can no longer be denied. The genome has been sequenced, some diseases are yielding their secrets to genetic research and, in the realm of behavior, statistical studies are demonstrating genetic influences on everything from reaction time to religiosity and happiness. As for evolution, flat earthers are still denying Darwin, but in scientific circles he has won the day, and his theory and extensions of it are clearly more than a little relevant to behavior. Here, too, the

approach bears little resemblance to the parallel efforts of the late 19th century. Finally, a revolution in brain science—not least of all due to advanced techniques of brain imaging—has removed all reasonable doubt as to the isomorphism of brain and mind. This is a direct extension of the 19th-century program in brain science, but it is much, much better.

These two books promise to help us think through the social implications of this great transformation. The first, Pinker's *The Blank Slate*, is the broader and more ambitious work, attempting to show how commitment to a tabula rasa view of human nature has misled the modern social sciences and therefore misled policy. If it sometimes seems to be flogging a dead horse, it is nonetheless a brilliant and forceful summary of the current evidence for biological influences on human social life.

Pinker reviews the blank-slate notion from John Locke to Margaret Mead, thoroughly demolishing it with evidence for the power of genes in behavior, evolution in culture, brain in mind. With equal cogency he also replies to challenges raised by recent advocates of blank slatism. How, for example, can the human genome, only twice as big as that of the near-microscopic roundworm, determine anything about our complex mental life? It can if we consider not just the number of genes but their interactions and hierarchical ordering. How can the human brain be less malleable than artificial neural networks, which have great capacity for learning? Because the brain has evolved over hundreds of millions of years and contains many pieces of dedicated circuitry—some as old or older than the hills—assembled largely by the genes.

In the philosophical core of his book, Pinker considers four feared outcomes of Darwinian theory: justifying discrimination, abandoning attempts to improve humanity, destroying free will and responsibility, and the loss of meaning and purpose from life. Each of these understandable fears, Pinker argues, is unfounded.

Asking if racism and sexism could be justified, he answers emphatically, "Absolutely not! The case against bigotry is not a factual claim that humans are bi-

ologically indistinguishable. It is a moral stance that condemns judging an *individual* according to the average traits of certain *groups* to which the individual belongs." Of course, if the average traits of certain groups do differ, that might lend support to "statistical discrimination." But in the case of race, Pinker points out that the biological differences are, in fact, trivial. Moreover, Jefferson's urging "that all men are created equal" was about rights, not sameness. Perfectibility, for its part, is enhanced by knowledge of our own natures. Furthermore, Pinker writes, a concept of human nature itself "provides a yardstick to identify suffering in any member of our species." It is because we have comparable natures that universal empathy for suffering is possible and universal notions of human rights valid.

children's personalities and behavior, instead ceding most causation to genes and peers. Unlike race, gender is a valid and significant biological and psychological category, which, despite huge overlaps between male and female, does help us predict some aspects of behavior and mental life.

The science dovetails with discussions of policy issues, and here Pinker is less helpful. For example, he quotes a *Boston Globe* columnist who asks, "So why is America more violent than other industrialized Western democracies?" The columnist gives a cultural answer, but Pinker proceeds to debunk all the usual cultural explanations. After explaining what he calls the "evolutionary logic of violence"—which he does very well—he goes on to say, "Human nature is the

of violence achieve that result through policies that reflect an understanding of human nature? Perhaps not in the scientific sense, but Europeans in general have always tended to be more cynical than Americans, less sanguine, for better or for worse, about the possibility of change. Americans have often done well with our high expectations, but unless we come to terms with the limitations of human nature, they will continue to stand squarely in our way.

PAUL H. RUBIN'S AIM IN *DARWINIAN Politics* is at once more modest and more ambitious. He focuses on political behavior but his aim, as the book's subtitle suggests, is to explain "the evolutionary origin of freedom." An economist by training, he came late to the biological banquet, but he has digested many things. His purpose is "to examine, from an evolutionary perspective, certain political behaviors and preferences common to humans." He succeeds admirably.

Rubin begins at the beginning, with an account of hunter-gatherer life in the human "environment of evolutionary adaptedness" (EEA). For most of our evolution we lived in small, face-to-face groups, surrounded mostly by kin and depending on others for sustenance through reciprocal relationships. There was little division of labor except by sex, but some men could dominate women and other men, and they passed on the genes for a number of unfortunate human behaviors. From this era also comes our easy commitment to groups and our willingness to devalue those outside them, sometimes to the point of violence. Violence within hunter-gatherer groups was also not uncommon, although mechanisms restricting violence—sharing, talking, exchanging gifts and spouses—were pervasive.

As we settled into agricultural and pastoral villages, gradually building them into what we are pleased to call civilization, the intensity and ubiquity of group conflict greatly increased. Conquest often entailed slaughter, usually of men. Women, especially young ones, were kept alive for partly reproductive reasons, and this pattern also may have had genetic consequences, although there has not been enough time

Steven Pinker seems to believe that evolutionary biology has the answer to everything, but actually it can only be a starting point for a complex biocultural analysis.

As to responsibility, legal assessments increasingly entertain the argument that biological influences are exculpatory. But punishment also is an influence on human action that is mediated by the same brain that generated the crime. Both evolutionary and criminal psychologies suggest that the certainty of punishment turns the power of human nature against wrongdoing. Nor need biology drain life of meaning; Pinker cites Kant's awe at "the moral law within" as evidence of the opposite effect.

"A man has got to know his limitations," is the apt Clint Eastwood quote that sets the tone for the rest of the book, a well-informed and well-written account of those limitations. In a graceful interleaving of scientific and literary sources, Pinker takes us through some of what we know of our constraints. They are sobering. We unquestionably have selfish and violent tendencies, tempered mainly for our children and other close relatives and in reciprocal or gainful relations with others. For all our efforts at nurturance, Pinker finds little evidence that different styles of parenting significantly shape our

problem, but human nature is also the solution.") Alas, he only gives us evidence for the first half of that sentence, and he doesn't answer the *Globe* columnist's question. If Americans share the same human nature with people in much less (as well as much more) violent cultures, how can human nature explain the differences? This is not a minor problem; Pinker seems to believe that evolutionary biology has the answer to everything, but actually it can only be a starting point and, in some ways, a guide for a complex biocultural analysis, most of which depends on the same social-science approaches that have served us in the past.

But it's enough to ask Pinker to debunk blank slatism, trace its history and offer a more than competent summary of what we know now about what evolution and genes have written on the slate without asking him to solve the problems, too. Pinker is not a policy maker, nor does he have all the answers to our social ills. But he does know one big thing: No policies of any sort, in any realm of life, can fare well ignoring human nature. Do the European democracies with lower levels

since the rise of towns for much genetic change. If you doubt these patterns, you can read excellent new research in archeology and anthropology or, to save time, you can just reread the Bible.

The key question raised again and again in this well-crafted book is, "How well does a given kind of social or political order meet the needs we evolved in the EEA?" In the chapter on altruism, Rubin considers several extant explanations—kin selection, cooperation, reciprocal altruism and group selection—for the evolution of altruistic tendencies and shows how their legacy in human nature may be affecting us in the vastly larger-scale societies we live in now. For example, Rubin believes that Americans' dissatisfaction with the welfare system drew on our evolutionary distaste for shirkers and cheaters and grew until the adjustments of the late 1990s brought the system back into line with our evolved tendencies. This may seem satisfying, but it doesn't explain why the Scandinavians, with the same evolved tendencies, are still willing to countenance so much more welfare. The citizens of these mild, judicious welfare states are descended from Vikings; we may not know why they changed, but genes are not high on the list of plausible explanations.

Then, too, there is a Procrustean bed aspect to Rubin's use of the EEA. In the chapter on envy, for example, he argues that this emotion was highly adaptive during our evolution because it prevented others, regardless of skill, from becoming too dominant. Now, however—the argument goes—envy is maladaptive because the wealth of the few benefits the many. Aside from Rubin's credulity about the sources and consequences of wealth—emphasizing productivity and frugality as means of wealth accumulation, he ignores inheritance, exploitation and cheating—he has now used the EEA argument in two contradictory ways. We must modify the welfare system to encourage work because that satisfies the evolved human tendency to resent shirkers, but

we must resist the evolved tendency to envy because, unlike the resentment of people on welfare, resentment of the rich is no longer adaptive. Here Rubin risks a convenient modification of the analysis to accommodate a certain political leaning.

Yet Rubin is no Hobbesian. He is careful to distinguish the desire of some individuals to accumulate wealth from the desire, all-too-often associated with it, to accumulate power. He correctly argues that throughout our evolution, dominance was advantageous but restricted, with the net result being that there was more freedom from the authority of strongmen than there has been for most of subsequent history. Given the ties that bind in a kin-based, face-to-face society, men at least were relatively free.

This leads to perhaps the most important point of the book. Contra Hobbes, autocratic society violates human nature for most of those who belong to it and therefore is inherently unstable. Rubin also argues, however, that libertarianism is unstable because it entails extremes of individuality that equally violate evolved human tendencies and thus cause social breakdown. What then is the pattern of political life most consistent with those tendencies?

This is where we have been moving all along, both in the world and in the book, and in broad strokes it roughly corresponds to the kind of polity we have in the United States today. (Oddly, he doesn't cite Hegel or Fukuyama, with whom he has an intriguing complementarity.) Rubin recognizes that this polity still needs to be made a lot better, and he is not unaware that even a semblance of fair play and freedom for all is a quite recent development. However, America's—or, for that matter, Italy's or Sweden's or various other democracies'—combination of respect for individuality, systematic restrictions on power, opportunity for the accumulation of wealth, relative perception of fair play and relatively high floor under the most disadvantaged reflects a surprising number of features of the kind

of society we evolved in. Or, more precisely, it satisfies with different devices the same needs that evolved there and that remain with us still.

This is not an implausible argument; I have made it myself in these pages. But before we conclude that all's for the best in this best of all possible worlds, we should mention two caveats. First, there was no EEA; there were EEAs. Anthropologists are still trying to understand what the range of adaptations was, as a prelude to becoming more confident in inferring a central tendency. Second, and more important, democracy is a work in progress; many varied experiments in democracy are already under way, not to mention those to come.

It is one thing to say that our evolved human nature precludes a good life and a good society under either autocracy or libertarianism. It is quite another to try to cut the varied cloth of democracy much more finely using the relatively blunt instrument of what we know now about our evolved human nature. At the moment, I find John Rawls' theory of justice, which Rubin rejects, to be as consonant with what we know about the EEAs as Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism, which he embraces. But we still have a lot to learn.

Yet these are quibbles. Both these fine books help with a task that we all must begin to take seriously. Pinker and Rubin suggest that we are ready to overcome the fruitless nature-nurture battles, which have generated so much more heat than light, and do the hard work of incorporating advances in biology into our thinking about political and social life. I am not an optimist, but these two books are encouraging. Can it be that we have finally grown up? ♦

MELVIN KONNER, *the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Anthropology and associate professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at Emory University, is the author of The Tangled Wing: Biological Constraints on the Human Spirit, Revised and Updated Edition.*

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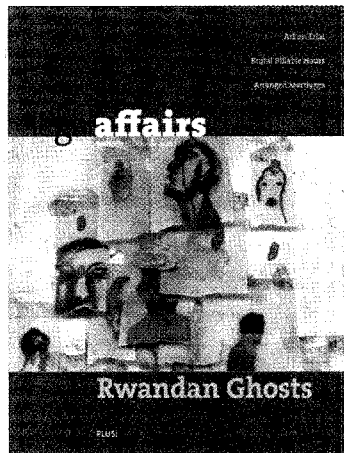
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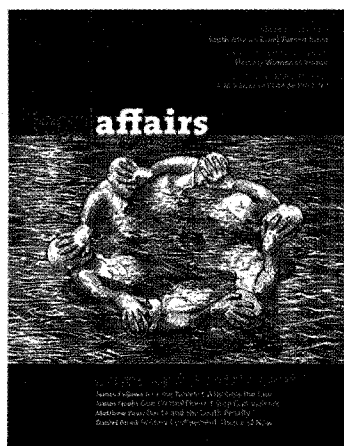
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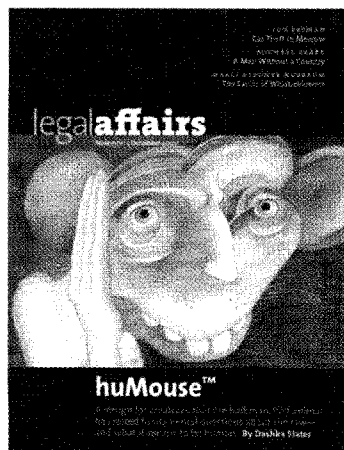
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